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Gender, Patriarchy and Capitalism

A Social Forms Analysis

Dr. philos. thesis, April 1996, 14 chapters, 583 pages.

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# Gender, Patriarchy and Capitalism

## A Social Forms Analysis

This is the 2008 internet publication of the original dr. philos. thesis text written in 1996, originally published by The Work Research Institute and University of Oslo, 1997. Please note: the text has not been revised. The text may have some format and illustration errors due to conversion from the original text format. See also the errata list. To get the properly formatted paper version,



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*The author*

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## Foreword

A gift represents a social form, or a basic element in it. A commodity represents another social form, while a redistributive unit like a ration represents a third. Each basic form is characterised by one main verb, like giving in the gift form, exchanging in the commodity form, and redistributing or sharing in the redistributive form.

This is the simple idea behind the 'social forms analysis' approach which is developed in this text, in order to understand how gender, patriarchy and capitalism are connected. Instead of nouns, like 'production' or 'socialisation', I start with verbs. This leads to categories that are verb-like, engaged in a process, rather than concepts that presumably exist as such, and can then be applied to gender.

Often, the task is to understand why the verbs are *not* there. "Gender is what we do, that appears as what we are" (Holter 1984f). Gender is performance, as Judith Butler (1994) has argued, but we must also understand why it appears as nonperformance. Why am I perceived as masculine? There is a wider staging that *precedes* any concrete act. Yet that, also, is *created* in some sense. So verbs appear noun-like, static, and the task is to understanding what goes on behind this appearance of things.

My background as a work life researcher is more important for the method in this text than is immediately evident. In this qualitative, interdisciplinary and action-oriented tradition, there is the assumption, often only implicit, that life is best understood as a process one participates in and not as something to be looked at from above. We often come into work processes precisely when things have become static, frozen in a conflict, and we try to understand what goes on.

This is very different from many academic approaches, although the difference is not so easily defined. It often concerns the use more than the choice of concepts. Robert Connell's (1987) critique of "categorical theory" comes close: what we try, instead, is to create "processual theory". In my own approach, there *is* also a basic category framework, and the reader will see that I put quite some effort into keeping it logically consistent, like a 'kernel code' that stays the same, wherever it is applied. The verbs I just described belong to this framework. Yet instead of extending it, I try to keep it small, based on the argument, which may look strange at first, that its "basic" quality

is mainly fictitious. It is a way of creating a space for analysis focused on how institutions are created and changed through activities, but this space is itself part of the processes described, and changes accordingly. The observation system is part of the observed system, and so the task of theory is to understand how it is connected, and how it nevertheless may be put to some use, instead of attempting to disconnect.

I put this idea of verbs, change and participation into a more radical epistemological use than is common in sociology. It is radical in the sense just described, a scepticism towards categories that are presented as if they were valid as such, independent of context. I call this "abstractism", and connect it to the psychodynamic notion of sublimation as well as the economic notion of fetishism. As we shall see, such tendencies may be amply present also when one tries to focus on activities, verbs, changes. Nevertheless, this leads beneath the level of the market, beyond the ordered terrain of classification, to an attempt to understand how activities are transformed into results, and why it is that these results, or nouns, appear as granted rulers of the verbs. Why do I act like a man? Because I *am*.

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As this text was in its last phase, I got hold of Slavoj Žižek's (1995) much-acclaimed work *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. I shall discuss a few of its points, as a key to the philosophically minded reader. Žižek is one of the few who has recognised the importance of Alfred Sohn-Rethel's (1975) critique of commodity epistemology, which has been important for my own approach. Sohn-Rethel's theme was 'the abstract conceptual mode of thinking', the categories of 'pure reflection' that he analysed in Kant's work. These categories, Sohn-Rethel argued, are not independent of the actual conditions of modern society. They are not simply reflections of the material reality, yet they are *part* of the abstraction process of capitalism – not unlike the notion of the *unconscious* as part of life. This is where Žižek applies his view, turning to a discussion of Lacan's theory. Before this, however, he gives an outline that usefully serves to introduce some main ideas in the present text.

"The exchange abstraction", Sohn-Rethel wrote, "*is not* thought, but it has the *form* of thought." This *form* can be compared to a very basic and broad set of rules regarding how phenomena are perceived and connected. Sohn-Rethel, Žižek writes, had the courage to confront "the closed circle of philosophical reflection with an external place where its form is already 'staged'". Since this was an "uncanny experience", even "unbearable", he was not exactly greeted with enthusiasm.

I do the same kind of thing in terms of sociology, yet I also change Sohn-Rethel's line of approach considerably. The abstractism so prevalent in sociology is not simply a matter of commodity reification, or of the relationship between mental and manual labour, as he thought. Gender comes into it too, and through gender, a much wider field of *reciprocity forms* appears. Why does it appear? Basically because gender equality has never only been a question of *how much*, but mainly a question of *how*, in what way, in what sort of relation. This is what was touched upon at the start, the not-so-trivial matter of different 'verbs'. So while Žižek sees the exchange abstraction as a stage, I see it as a barrier, or veil, yet one that also is quite open and informative, if one understands how it works. Secondly, behind it there are many kinds of processes, not one. Thirdly, it pertains to gender as much as the economy as commonly defined.

Fourthly, these *other* kinds of verbs, or reciprocity forms, have their veils too; things are not only 'pure' or open there. They have their own forms of generalisation, different from the abstraction of capitalism.

Now this gendered aspect comes into Žižek's own text right away, and thus serves to bring the present topic into view. In the introduction, he presents the "Sherlock Holmesian question" why Habermas in his work on poststructuralism (titled *The Philosophical Discourse on Modernity*, published in German in 1985) never addresses Lacan on his own, nor has a single word on Althusser. So what kind of "theoretical amnesia" is this? Althusser, we know, came into the tragic but not quite unique position of a man who let his problems descend on a woman, and so this is an unspoken background matter in this debate. Although this concrete case belongs to psychiatric history, one might perhaps expect Žižek to bring women into the argument, or the issues of feminism. This is not done, instead we are first presented with the positions of the few great men who are of significance in this debate – Habermas; Lacan; Marx; Sohn-Rethel; Foucault; plus Althusser as the silenced brother. There would be no Sherlock Holmesian question here, was it not for the implicit fraternal premise: one should mention one's brothers, and so at this point, silence is indicative. Silence regarding feminism is not. Only after a (very concise and well observed) summary of these men's positions, definitively as a next step, Žižek throws in some signs of awareness of feminist issues, mainly as a matter of warnings against its "fundamentalism", ending with the argument (op.cit. 88-9) that "the feminist struggle, for example, is made possible only through reference to democratic-egalitarian political discourse." In other words, it is the brothers' debate that made feminism possible in the first place.

I am emphasising a background tendency in Žižek's book because it is very common, and because it becomes especially interesting when compared to the clarity he displays in other respects.

It is as if doing a bit of lens-cleaning on the 'optic', as Hans-Jørgen Schanz (1995) calls it, reintroducing economy critique and putting the result to the eye, means closing the other eye all the harder. And this, we shall find, is not quite coincidental. I would even venture the idea that it is precisely *because* men like Žižek and Schanz know what is involved on the first score, that they tend to display a little extra-ignorance on the second, not perhaps compared with male theorists in general, but certainly striking in contrast to their insights on the first subject.

It is against these kinds of strategies that a feminist like Rosi Braidotti (1989:92) argues that "essentialism may be a necessary strategy". She targets "what is being conveyed in the name of anti-essentialism", knowing full well that class, race, sexual preference, etc. come into being a woman (op.cit. 93). Yet "in order to make sexual difference operative as a political option, feminists should reconnect the feminine to the bodily sexed reality of the female". Like Žižek's, Braidotti's text may be used as a guide, by way of partial contrast, to the position that will be presented.

Braidotti argues for a sisterhood in the flesh, so to speak, based on the bodily female experience, in order to combat patriarchy. "The sexualisation and the embodiment of the subject are the key notions in what I would call 'feminist epistemology' in that

they provide the conceptual tools and the gender-specific perceptions that govern the production of feminist thought." (Op.cit. 90).

I call this position – which Braidotti outlines quite subtly – one of *immediate feminism*. I shall argue that immediate feminism has been, and is, of major importance both in terms of research and in political terms. That is not all, however. If we just witnessed an eye-closing on the male side, there is one here also. Capitalism just got lost. The commodity context of sexualisation has disappeared from view. Like the machine *is* simply capital in the traditional view, the body *is* just sexualised, and like the ideology of production, the counter-ideology of reproduction even wants us to use this fetishism as conceptual tool. I fully agree with Braidotti's argument for a "reevaluation of experience is the notion of the bodily self" – yet I fail to see how this is achieved by reducing bodies to carriers of 'sex difference'.

One wonders, then, if there is some inbuilt mechanism that ensures that using one kind of approach means losing sight of the other. Might not Žižek have turned his optics, his very pertinent idea of a staging, towards the implicit patriarchal character of the debate? Would he be blinded, then? Or quite the contrary helped, since the matter of freedom, equality and *brotherhood* is not quite unheard-of (or incidental, for those who care to look) in the economy-critical approach? Could not Braidotti's politics of embodiment turn to a critique of body reification, for example to ensure that it was also a politics for those who do not have the ideal, competitive and commercially appealing body? I am sure all this questioning is possible, and also that the interesting trait, today, is why we do not see more of it.

Often, tactical appeals contain two kinds of misjudgements. There is a too optimistic idea of what one may achieve on a competitive struggle level, and a connected bleak view of the possibility to go beyond that frame of approach, since the system is absolute, something one lives "under".

Both are displayed in Braidotti's text. Patriarchy she sees as "the actualisation of the masculine homo-social bond" (op.cit. 97), a clay monster of whose "absolute denial of the axiom expressed above" (i.e. not accepting sex as everything) Braidotti is sure. I am reminded of Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* (1991), two parallel stories of the creation of a clay man and a cyborg through an alliance of rebellious women and paternal male knowledge. The result is far more worthy of a woman's love than any real man could ever be. Yet it is not real, and in the end the virtual men dissolve.

In the current research about gender, that which goes into bodies and takes the sex difference as its compass constitutes perhaps no more than ninety percent, while patriarchy studies may constitute as much as ten percent (this may be optimistic; more facts on this account are given later.) Braidotti's text belongs to the first category. Instead of an analysis of patriarchy, we get a dose of *male mystique*, where one trait among many, the patriarchal kind of bonding we just visited, is turned into an all-round absolute, and connected to an idea that there is "*no symmetry*" (op.cit. 99) between the sexes. This is why (she quotes Irigaray) "women voicing their 'feminine' amounts to deconstructing any naturalistic notion of a female 'nature'." But that is not true. It is like saying that any working class manoeuvre on the labour market amounts to a deconstruction of capital. The 'no symmetry' argument is well known from the history of the working class, where it led to a whole series of projective policies

instead of owning up to capitalism as a common problem. It also led to persecution of the kind of theory represented by Sohn-Rethel, I. I. Rubin and others, whose Marxism remained a 'questioning practice'. Now we meet "gender/body character" in the same position where radicals in the 1970s put "class character". Why should it work any better this time? While Braidotti argues for a conscious, tactical approach, discussing Irigaray's texts as example of "apparent mimesis" of "essentialist logic" (op.cit. 99), I think this tactic has mainly led to a renewed closure by being turned into strategy and theory. The our-bodies, their-bodies framework must be understood, not just acted upon.

Why is it so important for both sides to look away? What is it we all want to look away from? This text can be read as one huge pollution manoeuvre. I connect what should not be connected, starting with the notion that this sexualisation matter and the commodification matter may not be so far apart as commonly assumed. There is a 'value' side to gender and a 'gender' side to value; a disembodiment and reembodying that go on as parts of a wider cycle.

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As I look at this text in retrospective, two things happen more or less at the same time. There is the manifest argumentation, starting from gender as a practical proposal, gender as in 'trying to find somebody to love'. We meet the curious manifestations that appear in fleeting moments as everyone looks for the best one, the right one, and use these as our 'lenses' towards gender and patriarchy.

There is also a latent argument, however, or a silent dialogue which is given voice only in the last chapters, for reasons that pertain, precisely, to the matter at hand. I want to inform the reader that one of the most central categories in my own framework, developed fifteen years ago, what I simply called *Beauty* at the time, was a constant source of doubt later. Having written a thesis called *The Gender Market* in 1980, and being "informed" by the kinds of reactions it got, I found myself repeating the tendencies I had set out to criticise. I became embarrassed. I avoided using the Beauty category, and more or less turned away from the gender market as if it were in fact a peripheral affair, at best a metaphor, like my critics said.

It was only by going back to my findings, and perhaps by being able to empathise some more with the tendencies displayed in them, that I was able to recognise this pattern in my own subsequent work. Thereby, the larger 'avoidance matter' that I had often felt was there in others' views, emerged in a more personal sense also. I now believe that there is what Freud would have called a *taboo* in this area, one which is far more important than commonly recognised. I am not quite sure about what it involves, but I am certain that it includes a solid "no" to bringing critical gender analysis and capital analysis together. And when this is recognised, it requires no great stretch of the imagination to consider the possibility that it also concerns a greater, real-life barrier against bringing women, as subjects, and capital together. Along this road of discovery, indirectly displayed in this text, I was in for some surprises, not least the fact that this taboo may not be so very masculine after all, but rather one that hides a quite different reality.

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When I started writing this text, I tried to re-focus on my topic as unknown, as an enigma. If most people want men and women to share benefits and burdens equally, why has that goal not been achieved anywhere? Why is, instead, the tendency that men go first, women second, continuously recreated, even if it may be less marked than before? Why is it that current knowledge of gender and patriarchy, and policies based on it, do not create gender equal status?

At first sight, a social forms approach may appear like a detour. In light of what I just said, one may wonder if I should instead have gone right to the issue of gender and capital. Yet if I had done so, I would probably have been even less able to approach the taboo and avoidance matter than I am. There is a wider sense of change, of life beyond categories, which is of major background importance through all of this, in order to avoid a kind of tunnel vision that usually leads to a halt, and the bleak view described above. The reciprocity dimension brings the wider terrain into view, some light and fresh air, and it is also this 'detour' that has allowed more specific lines of inquiry, including an examination of the victimisation patterns connected to the taboo.

On another level, some might think that most of the above discussion, including an attempt to understanding commodities, gifts and redistribution in one theoretical framework, is a rather long way to go in order to clarify questions of gender and social equality. However, this 'gender' itself is not so easily limited. To the 'abstract conceptual mode of thinking' belongs the illusory idea that gender resides somewhere special in society, in a place of its own, as against the rest of society, which supposedly is not gendered. Therefore one does not need a theory of society in order to understand what gender is about, and why gender relationships are still not egalitarian. A gender theory is enough. That is not true, however.

Through a series of studies over the last twenty years, starting from the more 'manifest' activities associated with gender like partner selection, I have become acquainted with a ground rule saying that to anything gendered, there is something neutral; the gendered presupposes a certain neutrality. This continuous dual placement of gender is, precisely, what we meet, when we ask what hinders equality. There is also a second, opposite rule: to many things neutral, there is something gendered. I do not agree, however, with those who simply turn the first rule around; *all* things neutral are not 'really' gendered. Such a view creates a closed system. Although 'the world' and 'gender' implicate each other, and though the ways in which 'gender' implicates or determines 'the world' are still often unrecognised in social science, there remains a basically asymmetrical relation. Neutrality is not only neutralised masculinity, and I shall defend a 'world epistemology' *vis-à-vis* views that either ignore gender, or put it above everything else.

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Some notes on my own background. – As a sociology student in the early 1970s, I wrote on commercialisation of music from a perspective of reification and meaning (Holter 1973; Holter, Marcussen et al. 1974). Like many other young people at the time, I found music important, but also intriguing, hard to grasp *as* a meaning system (which I had not the slightest doubt that it was). I disagreed with those who thought that pop and rock music only 'say' something when the text is explicit, and that the

main theme of love does not say much at all. I wanted to know how 'giving' in the sense of 'giving expression, giving vent to' met 'exchanging' in this context.

This feeling of being faced with a riddle has remained regarding gender. This was a topic that I turned to after a three-year factory work break from my sociology studies in the mid-1970s, an important experience for a middle class intellectual like myself. I had grown up in a home where gender and equality questions were often discussed, since my mother Harriet Holter was one of the early Scandinavian contributors in this area. Elise Boulding (1992:6) finds that "she was the first to do a systematic analysis of how practices of stratification lead to power discrepancies between men and women" [cf. Holter, H 1970]. Many important notions – gender as mainly a social affair; oppression as relative, not absolute; changing with social context rather than static; society, not just men, creating it – notions that I make full use of in this text, I have from her. In the 1970s I was both aware of the importance of this subject, and interested in doing something else for myself, which was one reason why I turned to the topic of music. Yet in the end 1970s, participating in the 'Saturday night culture' of young people at my work place, my focus on music and commercialisation shifted from the music or the stage, to the public itself. So I came into gender studies backwards, so to speak, studying the interaction that focuses on love.

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Some main questions of the following text can be formulated. If patriarchy is not fully dissolved, what are the reasons for its continuous existence? Is it true that patriarchal positions, while no longer overt or manifest, are nevertheless 'reinscribed' in a sex difference and sex attraction code – and in seemingly neutral matters? What is the character of this split, and what is avoided through it?

Five types of sources have been of main importance.

(1) The first consists of qualitative and quantitative empirical studies of contemporary gender and patriarchal relations, especially in the area of partner selection and family formation (e.g. Holter 1980; 1990a; 1990c)

(2) Studies of work organisation, including organisation of tasks in the household and family context, and of the interaction between job and family patterns (Solheim, Heen and Holter 1986; Holter 1987b; 1993a; 1994b).

(3) Studies of men in a gender equality perspective (Holter 1987e; 1989a; Holter and Aarseth 1993; Holter 1993d).

(4) Historical research, primarily consisting of studies of early forms of patriarchy (Holter 1984g; 1985a; 1988a; 1994g).

(5) A fifth and more strictly theoretical area of my work has involved sociological reinterpretation of the critique of political economy, where feminist issues have been central (Holter 1982a; 1984f; 1986c; 1991i; 1995a).

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I want to thank the Research Council of Norway, Programme for Basic Women's Studies, for a 1½ year grant for the present work. That proved to be a too strict time limit, and I would not have been able to finish had it not been for the understanding, sympathy and financing I got from my work place, The Work Research Institute (altogether, the text is the result of close to three years of work).

Through comments and critique, several people have helped me through the creation of this text. I want to thank Kari Margrethe Kepple for her warm support and advice, and for our many talks that always end somewhere surprising. I also want to thank my mother Harriet Holter for her support and her openness towards continuing feminist inquiries, and my sons Lasse and Martin for keeping up with this – as well as for not always doing so. Knut Oftung, Jørgen Lorenzen, Lars Jalmert, Helene Aarseth, Michael Kimmel, Runa Haukaa, Petter Ingebrigtsen, Rudi Rusfort, Marianne Brandtsæter and others have given much support and encouragement regarding studies of men issues as well as general feminist issues. I want to thank Stein Bråten for comments that were important for going from the third to the fourth and final version of the text. Further, my thanks go to Dag Østerberg for reminding me of class theory; to Judith Stacey for political analysis discussions; to Joan Acker for comments relating especially to feminist materialism, and to Joan Dyste Lind, Øivind Andersen, and others for historical discussions. Discussions with the anthropologists among my colleagues at the WRI, Tordis Borchgrevink, Hanne Heen, Jorun Solheim and Tian Sørhaug, have been important especially regarding gift reciprocity analysis, for which I am grateful. Other colleagues including Bjørg Aase Sørensen, Anne Marie Berg, Asbjørn Grimsmo, Annar Aas, Øivind Pålshaugen, Per Engelstad and others have also contributed through discussions. Last but not least, informal talks with my friends have been important, also by showing how daily life versions of the questions I discuss remain more subtle than any theory can describe. My thanks go to Bjørn Moe, Ba Clemmetsen, Trine Klette, Jon Birger Korsvold, Johan Bratholm, Marianne Sætre, Rune Ottosen, Ragnar Næss, Wendy Wigers, and others 'who know who you are'.

### *Note on language, text and reference conventions*

Quite a few 'Norwegianisms' have probably survived in the present text. A PC spell checker does not make up for a knowledgeable English-speaking person's proof-reading, and this time around I have not had the time or money for the latter. Some language peculiarities are intended, since I have the bad habit of trying to force the language to follow my own way of thinking.

I have followed the recent convention using *s* instead of *z* in words like *organise* (not *organize*).

Authors are generally referred to by last name, first letter of first name, year, and with letter a, b, c, etc. if necessary. My own works are referred to without first name abbreviation.

I have not been able to make an index for the present version of the text.

For simplicity diagrams as well as figures are listed as figures.

# Part 1

## Chapter 1 Introduction

## A first approach

"Patriarchy" is a somewhat diffuse term for a difficult but also important subject. Some think the category is inherently ideological. The term is not commonly used in official documents regarding equal status questions, perhaps for that reason.

For evaluating the case for "patriarchy theory", one may note its fate in former Yugoslavia. Young feminists in Yugoslavia drew attention to surviving, reorganising patriarchy already in the middle of the 1980s, arguing that a new form of patriarchy was appearing, which was "*more pervasive and domineering than the old, traditional form*" (Jancar, B 1988, my emphasis) – a judgement and prophecy that was to become all too true, considering the crimes committed specifically against women, like mass rape, besides those towards civilians in general in the subsequent war. In a paper written during the war, Zarana Papić (1994) found that the atrocities resulted from "nationalist ideologies [that] promote an aggressive and violent masculinity whose barbaric behaviour is justified in the name of each nation's cause (...) Women's rights are ignored, and women are seen only as wives and mothers who will breed and rear future defenders of the nation." We find similar tendencies in many other authoritarian contexts in our century, like the Stalinist repression in the 1930s, where the women's organisations were dissolved as a prelude to the rest.

Research and theories about patriarchy, then, whatever the word used for this subject, are not a minor or peripheral issue. Ignoring questions of patriarchal reorganisation can be highly dangerous for democracy and peace. Although it is indicative that the word 'patriarchy' is avoided also in the central statement from the 1995 UN Women's Conference in Beijing, 'exploitation' and 'dominance' are nevertheless used in all areas, economic, domestic and sexual, and in its main content, this statement calls for an all-round effort to investigate, uncover and dismantle all forms of patriarchy.<sup>1</sup>

Over the last decades, women's studies and gender studies, and recently also studies of men, have tried to develop an understanding of this difficult subject, usually defined as relations that oppress or lead to oppression of women. Patriarchy – whether this term is used or not – has emerged as a complex and manifold phenomenon, necessitating a broad range of approaches and an inquiry also into other relationships of power, like that of social class. Patriarchy may be defined as a system on its own, yet in most studies we find that patriarchal relations are closely connected to other relations of power, often as a hidden aspect of the latter.

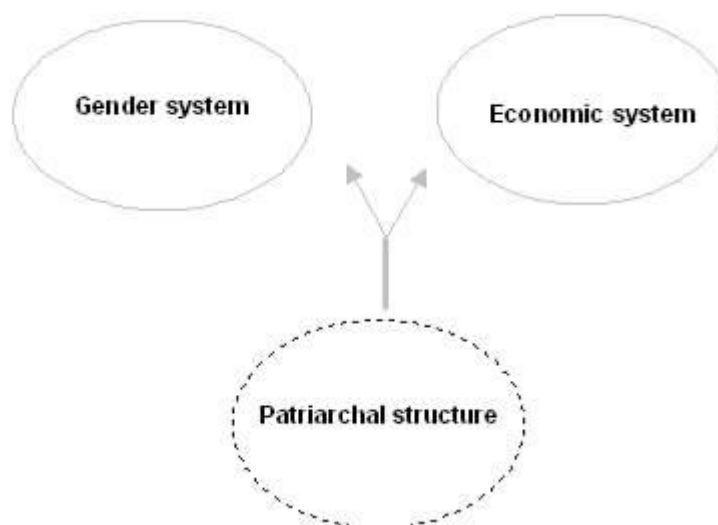
This latent, background character of patriarchal organisation is in many ways a modern trait. It is commonly recognised that pre-modern and early modern societies were much more explicitly patriarchal. On the other hand they did not have our kind of gender. This difference is not commonly recognised, and it is a main theme of the present text. Pre-modern people sometimes put as much emphasis on sex difference as we do, but they did not give this difference the kind of meaning we associate with gender, nor did they give it the same role in society. Briefly put, they had a patriarchal order, not a gender order. Therefore, also, their forms of intimacy differed considerably from the modern organisation called sexuality.

These major changes are part of the background of the social forms framework presented in this text. They also help explain my focus on 'the commodity form' and theories relating to it, including various traditions of Marxist and critical theory. Pyschodynamic theory has also been relevant. If patriarchy is an object of some anxiety and denial in modern society, so, we shall find, are many aspects of the commodity form, especially its human implications. A critical approach is therefore needed, yet also a reorientation of critique itself. In order to understand gender, critical economic theory must move back to its own 'home ground', the household. This leads beyond the commodity form opposition between 'value' and 'use value' (including the often found notions of value as evil, use value as good), towards other forms of reciprocity.

If we are to understand 'patriarchy', the abstract, timeless notion of gender must first be unravelled, and this is best done by examining the practices associated with gender in contemporary society. Part one of the text concerns this subject, while part two concerns patriarchy.

The model below shows the main paths of analysis in the text. It looks like an Y, so I call it an "Y hypothesis model" of patriarchy

#### **A "Y" hypothesis model of patriarchy**



Most of the discussions concern the relations between these three fields.

There is the idea that the Y concerns a main pattern of historical development, i.e. one *from* a patriarchal order of society *to* two more separated spheres in modern society. It should at once be stated that the terms 'gender' and 'economy' are used here only as an approach: we shall find quite a bit of both in both spheres.

There is also the idea that this Y pattern often holds good today, in contemporary society, where the deeper-level patriarchal structure is not quite dead and buried.

The first chapters concern the gender area, the kinds of practices found in it, how they create gendered positions and outlooks, and why gender appears differently for

women and for men. A discussion of the gender system concludes the first part of the text. Here I disentangle three forms of organisation that are often mixed together in current analyses. These are 'sexed' organisation, implying differentiation; patriarchal organisation, implying stratification, and gendered organisation, which combines the former two. The unique character of modern gender relates to this combination and the comparative 'disappearance' of patriarchy itself.

Part two concerns patriarchy, how to define and study it, and its historical and contemporary development. I start by outlining a main hypothesis, namely that there is a connection between patriarchal organisation and a certain kind of split in the commodity form, a 'differentiation principle'. The subsequent discussion examines a third relation which is not drawn in the figure, connecting the two spheres at the top. This relation creates a remarkable scenery of 'difference', a true challenge for anyone who wants to understand how the gendered and the neutral, and the private and the societal of our lives, 'work it out' together.

## Social form

Our society is characterised by different co-existing forms of reciprocity, and although this dimension may be subdued when studying topics like social class, it cannot be ignored in the case of gender. It is these co-existing reciprocity relations and types of signification that, taken together, may be analysed as social forms, usually connecting two main elements, differentiation and stratification. A social form encourages certain kinds and degrees of dominance and exploitation, constraining others, leading to institutionalisation of activity organisations and disciplinary structures. It usually appears as a presupposed common ground, as something taken for granted, and so conflicts usually centre on positions and relations within it, rather than the form as such.

Despite all attempts to the contrary, it must be admitted that 'social form' remains a somewhat diffuse category throughout this text. It is easily conceived as a 'reciprocity form', yet the question remains what exactly 'reciprocity' means. Still, categories may be valuable for being diffuse, or as some would say, 'open', as long as they are diffuse *about* something. I think that is the case here. On a common-sense level, we all know there is a difference between a relationship of giving, one of exchanging, and one of sharing. Social forms, types of reciprocity, transactional orders and similar terms all point to this *qualitative* dimension, which all too often is ignored in sociology, and by examining it, research efforts can become more contextually aware, and less prone to impose categories of power as essentials of human life.

Social forms are composed by main reciprocity patterns, which in turn contain different transfer types and transference fields. At each of these three levels, I distinguish between three main forms of interaction, connected to commodity exchange, gift relationships, and redistributive relationships. The resulting model is illustrated below:

### Main social forms framework

Basic forms --> Levels	<i>Exchanging</i>	<i>Giving</i>	<i>Sharing</i>
<i>Transfer/</i> transference	Commodity exchange	Gift giving	Sharing/ redistributing
<i>Main reciprocity relationship</i>	Economic institutions including class, gender, 'race'	Gift institutions	Redistributive institutions
<i>Social form</i>	The commodity form	The gift form	The redistributive form

A concept like social form, although not quite as lofty as the philosophical idea of form, obviously belongs to a fairly wide historical and social context. Yet it can be 'grounded'; it becomes sociologically interesting and empirically verifiable mainly as a matter of *institutionalisation*, including the institutionalisation of human being which some would call 'individuation'. These institutions can be further studied in terms of more specific transfer types, surrounded by a cultural and symbolic field which I call a transference field, giving the psychodynamic term a wider sociological meaning. As a first approach, one may think of transference as an *attempted solution* to the problems of transfers.

All this becomes a topic of interest once we go beyond the figure of gender, and ask about its ground, no longer focusing only on what 'follows' from gender, but turning to the kinds of relations that are expressed in femininity and masculinity. What we find, then, is a multidimensional fabric, connecting activities, transfers of activity results, transference fields, power relations and reciprocity patterns.

We shall find that gender analysis tendentially transcends the currently popular division of sociology into structural and individual-oriented theory, or the distinction between a systems world and a life world. If we want to understand individual action we must understand reciprocity or interdependency, and an understanding of reciprocities presupposes some idea of social structure. Social forms analysis is 'minimalist' in terms of general categories, which can be compared to 'kernel code' in data programming. General categories should be kept on a minimal level in order not to presuppose what one should investigate. Sociological categories are not only historical, but also 'reciprocal' or reciprocity-influenced, to be approached and evaluated on that level, with emphasis on their factual engagement. This methodological view is further discussed throughout the text and more specifically in chapter 7 and Appendix 3.

The analysis starts from an idea of reciprocity relations as connectors of individuals' activities, creating a practical basis for communication. Two "unfamiliarities" will meet the reader at this point. One concerns the existence of very different forms of reciprocity, even in our own society – different not in the sense of more or less, but in the deeper sense of qualitative gaps. If this thought is manageable, the next one brings

us further outside many common approaches to sociology: our own observer position is not outside the social forms model presented above, but deep within it, and social forms analysis takes this idea much further than is usual. So, for example, the "Y" figure presented earlier mainly concerns a specific locality in this model.

Social forms analysis does not ask: do people act for economical reasons or emotional kinds of reasons? Should we understand the world dialectically or through more positivistic forms of rationality? Should action be understood as grammar, or should concepts be embodied? It is not that kind of paradigm. This is where the 'minimalism' comes in. Instead it asks: what are the contexts that create an economic view of actions, or a grammar-like one, a rationalist one, or an embodying one? People 'as such' means *change*, and change goes beyond all of these categories.

By turning the inquiry towards contextual relations and main reciprocity orientations that run through different forms of action, social forms analysis relates structural patterns to interactional and phenomenological realities, connecting sociological theory to social psychological and psychodynamic views. In the present text, this is done for example in terms of basic psychodynamic notions, like that of unconscious processes and energies in relations. These phenomena are contextualised, as is the notion of societal 'structure' itself, since a transfer and reciprocity pattern, as elemental link, is seen as a creative of both. So if on one side, we have 'individuals', identities, and psychological patterns, on the other side we meet what is specifically posited as outside this sphere, as 'societal', society at large. One main interesting feature of the present framework is that these two sides are seen as changing according to the character of the reciprocity link itself. Divisions between the individual and the societal do not just "exist". Throughout history, some peoples have found it very important to delimit the individual from society, while others have worked hard to bring them together, while others again – in fact, most – have simply not been very occupied with that division but instead put emphasis elsewhere.

It may be argued that this is hard to imagine: as modern individuals, we are so used to opposing society and the individual that any attempt to touch this polarisation itself is tendentially 'forgotten' right away, or even denied or repressed.

On the other hand we all know how to do this, or some of it. We do it when we are in love and want to create a relationship, a family. As an individual in love, I *am* society, Roland Barthes (1979:213) says – and in this sense, I am a 'mystic':

I am "suspended 'a humanis'; I have no dialogue: with the instruments of power, of thought, of knowledge, of action, etc.; I am not necessarily 'depoliticised': my deviation consists in not being 'excited'."

So our unfamiliarities contain this paradox: they lead to a family.

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Families, we know, have problems. One of them concerns the continuous existence of unequal sharing of burdens and benefits inside the family itself, and related inequality in society at large. While writing the text, reports like the following came by my desk:

Women still earn less than men.

Women's wages are two thirds of men's, and their careers seldom lead to the best jobs, ILO argues.

The wage gap between women and men has not been significantly decreased over the last decade, ILO points out in a fresh report. (...) Before the year 2000, women will constitute at least half the labour force in most countries. Nevertheless, increased economic activity has only seldom led to improvement of the women's standard of living or their work conditions. (...) The organisation has calculated that by the present speed, it will take 475 years before there are as many women as men on the top leadership level.<sup>2</sup>

Twenty years of feminist research – as well as simply: research – has established the fact that such figures are the result of a power problem, one that concerns society at large as well as families.

Although related to power, a social form is not only, or mainly, a form of power; it remains distinct. Here, also, my view departs from much transfer- or economy-oriented analysis, including many variants of Marxism. The problems of commodity exchange do not reside 'in' the commodity, 'in' the transfer of exchange, or 'in' the market institution itself. On the contrary, that way of understanding social problems itself expresses what Marx called *fetishism*, basically meaning that one blames the messenger for the message. One takes the thing as hostage for the social relation that it signifies. The problems of contemporary patriarchy and capitalism reside in social relations throughout society and cannot be reduced to certain economic mechanisms. Economy is mainly seen as an *expression* of the social in the present approach, not as the basis of everything else. It is a type of expression that exists in a certain social context, very different, for example, from the form of expression of a 'religious' age. The real task concerns *why* we make the assumption that economy is basic, and this involves an understanding of our contemporary form of 'householding' that goes beyond economy as ordinarily conceived.

'Transfer fetishism' is one target of critique in what follows, with gender fetishism is one case. Commodity relations, gift relations, or redistributive relations may all be *more or less* symmetrical and mutually beneficial for those involved in it. Although reciprocity forms enable dominance and exploitation in different ways and to different degrees, these are not inherent in them, or simply caused by them. Social forms analysis departs from the 'economistic' view that stratification automatically follows from how people relate their activities, as well as the 'politicistic' view where there is one dimension of power that is applicable everywhere.

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There is also a problem for people, in terms of families – not having one, or having one that breaks up.

In that vacuum, even the 'shock' of departure, like the departure of women from their accustomed centrality in the life world of many men, a 'fearful, empty space'

(Borchgrevink, T 1995) appears. In a cultural landscape of turbulence, dissolution and alienation, old patterns re-emerge in new guises and with renewed force.

Skin colours and sex organs, subjects of a depoliticised debate and media/public sphere, are very 'concrete', using 'nature' at least as play-act. How should we evaluate the contemporary *repressive devalorisation* (Holter & Aarseth 1993:213pp.), the retreat from former politics and economics, now marked as old-time 'ideology', into the realm of the visible and the natural? What are the kinds of energies that go into it, in gender matters as elsewhere?

When Marx wrote *Capital*, he started with the "great mass of commodities" as the main characteristic of the modern world. He turned to things for analysing commodities. Today, however, the human commodity eclipses the commodity in the form of a thing. Human resources are increasingly recognised as a key issue of economic and social development. With increasingly sophisticated technology, these resources become more, not less, important.

This is also a development with some scary aspects. In the 'sale of the self', the personality is easily threatened. Thereby the avoidance matter reemerges, as socialisation is described in terms of human nature while society is disowned and kept at a distance. When gender is no longer isolated as a place by itself, or something between men and women, but instead seen as a bridge between the individual and society, these issues also come into consideration.

First we conceive of society as somewhere outside private life. Next we are amazed that private lives create very negative societal products, like renewed racism and victimisation processes. The current text is not 'political' in the common sense of evaluating capitalism politically. Nor does it propose a view of capitalism as run by some huge machine-like 'logic'. It is precisely this externalisation, the denial matter, which is my topic of inquiry, as well as the split view that results from it – including a black vision of capitalism 'out there' and a correspondingly idyllic idea of the life world 'in here'. As long as this split view is maintained, gender analysis is hindered; gender turns back on itself, and explanations run in a circle. What happens, then, is also a positioning of individuals, women on one side, men on the other, women as morally superior but socially weak, men as inferior but strong. In the attempt to avoid this, a specific position and experience is involved in the text, one focused especially on men's lives.

It may be argued that a 'natural justice' view of people's actions informs the following text. That is probably true. It is a generous view in the sense of assuming that people usually try to make out for the world at large – as well as for themselves as individuals. Some would argue that babies are born with this sense of natural justice. People are conditioned in the basic respect that they feel most at home when allowed to consider their own and the world's demands in relation, and, if possible, without too much conflict and tension. This is what society and individuals demand of each other anywhere, and so this is what people have learned at a very fundamental level. What comes after, like the mutations of 'justice' along with the development of wealth and power that Marx criticised, are only fleeting figures on this broader background. The rules of transfers, then, or transactional orders, may *depart* from this immediate sociality, and distort it. Yet people try to transcend transfers, to work them out, by



dream work if in no other way, to shift the terrain, and to move away from anything 'structural' in the negative sense, potentially changing these structures themselves. So as much as we shall find reasons to *question* gender, and criticise what I call 'the gender fixation', there remains the broader view that it also represents a *transference*, an attempted solution to the problem of patriarchy.

## Thesis outline

Chapter 1, Introduction, outlines the text itself and introduces the main thesis and gender equal status context.

In chapter 2, Somebody to love, I describe modern gender as a 'familiarising' system, with practices that become overt especially in the area of partner selection and family formation, and I discuss partner selection studies in this context.

In chapter 3, The gender market, I examine the intersection of gender and exchange logic in partner selection, reconsidering the gender market theory I developed in the end of the 1970s.

Chapter 4, In the mirror of the other, concerns gender identity formation from an in-depth economy critique perspective. I focus on two main levels of gender-related interaction, one 'dyadic', the other involving women only, and I describe the two world views that are created in this interaction.

Chapter 5, Works and families, turns to family formation and the relation between work life and family life. I discuss male-female interaction on the path towards a family, where relations of exchanging and giving are partially replaced by relations of sharing, and how power conflicts in families also become reciprocity conflicts.

Chapter 6, Men, outlines main results of Norwegian studies of men and experiences with research organisation in the men's studies field. I discuss theoretical challenges in this field, including the dislocation of the male subject and the present masculinities paradigm.

Chapter 7, Social forms analysis, presents the main theory framework of the text. I discuss how attempts to understand other forms of reciprocity are linked to a critique of our own dominant form, and the problems of critical theory in this regard. The 'commodity critique of gender' of the preceding chapters is reinterpreted in the wider social forms framework, preparing the ground for the 'gender critique of the economy' and the uncovering of patriarchal organisation in part two of the text.

First, in chapter 8, The gender system, I present a view of the contemporary gender system as a whole, discussing how stratification and differentiation principles are combined in it. I focus on studies that show gender as activity, and especially on those that turn to the form-related activity of sexuality. A view of gender identification as an abstract process involving 'transubstantiation' is presented, as well as a sociopsychological discussion of gender as a 'ledge' of existence. I also present some main rules and dynamics of the cultural 'gender fixation' in contemporary society.

In part two the scope is broadened. From the analysis of the modern gender system I turn to the more shadowy existence of patriarchy. This is done, first, in 'thesis' form.

In chapter 9, Patriarchy and the differentiation principle, I present the thesis that the comparatively close, broad and robust association between the commodity form and patriarchal organisation can be explained in terms of an inner differentiation of the commodity form. I describe a 'differentiation principle' that creates two main fields of interaction and institutions, what I call a Firstness field and an Otherness field, and I identify some main forms of this division.

Chapter 10, Theories of patriarchy, considers the current approach compared to other recent efforts to understand patriarchy and its connections to capitalism. I discuss how various theories of capitalism and patriarchy agree on some main points, and their central contributions to research.

Chapter 11, Problems of historical analysis, is a head-on attempt to tackle the huge subject called 'the emergence of patriarchy'. Although partly 'conjectural' – a usual critique of efforts in this area – some new kinds of conjecture are introduced. This is done in some detail, since many aspects of my own approach to social forms analysis were in fact developed in this historical studies context. I turn to early civilisations and discuss methodological as well as empirical problems, including the overlooked difference between patriarchal development on the one hand, and the development of a specifically patriarchal gender system on the other. In a second part of the chapter, some efforts towards understanding a non-commodity social form, not as an elemental transfer type, but as a whole, are presented. This is done using a new terminology, starting from a notion of 'focality' or 'focal dependency' that combines gift and redistributive principles on a 'large household' basis.

Chapter 12, On patriarchal strategy, continues the historical discussion, shifting the focus to patriarchy in its *Herrschaft* or specific power sense. Patriarchal strategy is described as a combination of stratification and differentiation, and some of its main types are outlined and related to the differentiation principle. In the last part of the chapter, turning to modern times, I present a three-stage model of modern patriarchy, distinguishing between a 'paternatic', 'masculinatic' and a third possible stage of 'androgynatic' patriarchy.

Chapter 13, Households and use values, explores the patriarchal character of capitalism not as an add-on matter but as inherent in the basic commodity categories and processes. The 'value at the back of gender' perspective is thereby turned around. I discuss economic theory in its original household conception and its 'homelessness' in the modern world. I link a qualitative feminist critique of economy to a critique of exploitation, arguing that the ideological closure of the domestic labour debate in the 1980s had a larger impact on mainstream feminism than usually recognised.

Whereas the concept of capital has been extended to include culture and many other matters, without much in the way of institutional and exploitation-related evidence, there is a very pronounced silence regarding gender as capital and capital as gendered. This *de facto* taboo of our own society is all the more striking when compared to the totem treatment given to gender as commodity category in other societies – notably the "exchange of women" in primitive society. I discuss the character of this taboo,

and go on to present an exploitation approach that is more nuanced than the proposals made around 1980.

In a second part of chapter 13 I turn to phenomenological analysis of the gender associations of the economic field, turning to its backstage of use value or utility. A deeply gender-related organisation appears, which throws doubt on much conventional thinking concerning the market, putting the sexualisation of commodities for example in advertising in a new light. I connect this organisation to a historical view of the creation of human needs.

Chapter 14 extends this analysis, first in the historical area, by exploring the curious turnaround of power in early modernity that appeared together with a massive victimisation process. I discuss the possibility that capital power, as equivalence power, may be less 'masculine' than first appears, bringing in symbolic evidence in this context that point to the contradictory character of the differentiation principle. What appears is an in-depth conflict between capitalism and patriarchy, and I discuss the modern gender system as a compensatory formation on that basis.

In chapter 15, Conclusion, presents an overview of the text as a whole, and sums up main results of the "Y" model of patriarchy and the hypothesised relation between commodity differentiation and patriarchal organisation. The last part of the chapter continues the exploration of the turnaround of power and the gender-related shift of polarity involved in capital processes. I discuss some possibilities for future research in this perspective, focused on victimisation and masculinity.

## The equal status context

Although the text is theoretical and research-oriented, it is also written in an equal status work context, and has an indirect applied character in this respect. In this section I start a discussion of gender equality perspectives in view of the current thesis.

Initially, it may be noted that the 'informally applied' character of gender and equal status-related studies are one of their strengths. The road from theory to practise is shorter here than in many other areas. This does not mean, of course, that theories change practices straightaway. The gap between the two is well known. What can be found, however (not least in a Scandinavian context), is popular engagement in a very broad sense, an attention to gender issues not only among women, but also increasingly among many men. This is mainly an informal, private life, personal experience kind of engagement, but it has also been of major importance on a societal and cultural level.

Gender politics are not 'correct' and cannot be, in the traditional political sense. The informal, democratic and personal aspects are precisely what makes this an interesting area – and also a forceful one. Although the more exotic parts of theoretical views may be lost on the way, there is good evidence that kernel viewpoints of feminist and gender theory are presented informally for example in the 'kitchen table' discussion setting described by Marianne Gullestad (1984). Different views of men and women, and different explanations and interpretations of equality and lack of equality, have

become more open and central topics, for example in family and relationship discussions.

The matter of correctness can also be used as an approach to the problems of the debate. In brief terms, much attention has been directed to gender, and less to what is implied in it, what lies beyond. This line of approach is questioned in the current text, suggesting more focus on patriarchy, not all of it on gender. The gender fixation discussed later is also a political tendency, and there are many reasons to believe that it contributes to a *stalemate situation*. It makes gender equality efforts into a Sisyphusian uphill struggle, where gains in some areas are counteracted by losses in others.

Over the last ten years, the percentage who does *not* want further gender equality politics has increased in a country like Norway, approaching two thirds of the adult population (Holter 1994b). This is connected to a belief that women's liberation is a thing of the past, gender equal status having been realised already – and an idea that something is wrong with the strategy, the kinds of goals that should be reached. This sceptical attitude is changed to a much more positive one, however, when concrete issues are on the agenda, especially when these issues relate to the "how" rather than just the "how much". *Care- and home-related* matters are especially important for many people. In a 1994 survey, 83 percent agreed that home care tasks should count as a qualification in job recruitment.

Feminists in the US and elsewhere may learn from the Scandinavian situation, where the curious alliance between "family values" and neo-patriarchal politics has been avoided. Scandinavians have generally realised that gender equality is good for families, while the lack of equality creates family conflicts. Yet that situation may change, if those who want to abandon the current gender equality efforts gain more support. One main recruitment factor is alienated men who for a variety of reasons turn against women. This is not a detail matter, and it is important to examine whether these men also have some valid reasons for their view, and to reduce that side of the affair. Neither is it a detail that many people associate equal status with women becoming like competitive men. An overloading of the gender question has created a defensive attitude where desegregation is seen as negative, with people feeling that their *differentiation* is continuously misrepresented as stratification.

Even if most people want men to be more care-oriented, that fathers should use more time with their children, and similar, the proportion that agrees with traditional task definitions, like a statement that "women are more fit than men for caring for children", has *increased* somewhat over the last years. Gender segregation remains large in the domestic sphere families as well as in wage work. In three of four Norwegian families, women do all or most of a task like preparing meals, and this proportion may have increased slightly over the last years (chap. 5).

Many people question what they perceive as the main equality strategy so far, namely that *desegregation* should go first, and *de-stratification* should follow. This is often conceived as a kind of 'meeting at the bottom' approach – resulting in two parents who are 'equal' in the sense of equally overloaded with work, no time for the children or the elderly, and so on. There are also reasons to question an equality discourse that only addresses power imbalances between men and women, while the increasing

alienation is mostly a non-subject. Many feel that family and private life have grown colder, with more commercial human relationships, more ambivalence and immaturity, divorces and break-ups for calculative reasons, more forms of abuse and more psychosomatic problems. Yet since these matters are *not* really addressed in the current discourse, the *target* easily becomes women and equality.

Norwegians 'want' gender equality also in the sense of 'wanting to believe it exists'. The gap between ideal and reality corresponds to another typical trait of Norwegian culture: finding someone to blame for that gap. The problem with 'alienation' and similar societal matters is that they target everyone, or most of us, and so they do not fit the cultural agenda. Instead, if women are not to be blamed for current problems, perhaps others are, like men. If feminists have questioned the role of men, they have had a curious kind of support from the media over the last decade, who often have enhanced the *problem character* of men in general and men who venture into women's traditional areas in particular. There is a Norwegian folk tale about the man who should look after the house while his wife was away, with sorry or even disastrous results – a morale that is still very noticeable. This has contributed to a split view of men among women especially, a gap between the man one knows personally, and the negative or threatening matter of men as such, unknown men. Each rape and abuse case feeds into this larger cultural dynamic, which is not only about 'uncovering the reality', but also about keeping both genders locked into the old stereotypes.

An anecdote regarding this grim picture of men may be in place here. As the book *Men's Life Patterns* (Holter & Aarseth 1993) went to print, the publishers wanted to determine its cover, arguing that they knew best what would have an effect on potential readers. What appeared, in their cover picture proposal, was a greenish face of a man who looked as if he had been continuously to the dentist for the last month or so. It was quite a struggle to avoid this and a number of similar proposals, all with the basic visual message that *men are a problem*. Or even; the subject of men will only *sell* if we either make them into the heroes of the world, *or* its worst problem. And beneath this: the old picture of the man as the great one, Atlas-like, *responsible*, more central and societal than woman, whether negatively or positively. Even in egalitarian Norway there is a continuous background process creating a need for this kind of clarity, and one main thread of the following text is an investigation of why it exists, why it is that many people perceive gender-related changes as if someone tried to push them down from a kind of ledge on which their personal security is based.

Faced with this, some say one should sugar the pill, not tread on toes, and so on. I am not convinced by that tactic – "if I am to go to the dentist, tell me how things are, for imaginations are worse than realities". I admit that this is partly a pragmatic question, there is something to be said for anaesthetic also. The problem is that it tends to obscure the wider reality. Even in recent pro-feminist books about men one reads how men should *not* "take a backseat to femininity" (my goodness, no!) and a rejection of "the notion that women can be role models for men" (as if they were not already).<sup>3</sup> I believe some of this goes the wrong way. The answer is not to *avoid* themes like patriarchy, as some seem to believe.

In the long-term historical perspective, the *patriarchy question* represents a widening of the *gender question*, which itself opened the *women question*. Most probably it is still too narrow, yet not as narrow as, either, the gender frame or the woman's status

frame. *Wider* here also means greater nuance, even if the word by itself by no means guarantees this. Focusing on patriarchy can develop gender analysis further, and dissolve simplified views of 'one sex there, the other here'. That, I believe, is a thoroughly healthy development.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the conference *Declaration and Platform for Action*. For a feminist view of UN human rights official language, cf. Schroder, H 1994; for a Danish example of 'patriarchy' put to fruitful use in an official document cf. Carlsen & Larsen 1994. In the EC, the European Science Foundation has a Gender Inequality Network that has recently announced its plans to create an *Atlas of Patriarchy in Europe*.

<sup>2</sup> *Aftenposten* 28th of August 1995, my trans.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from the press release to William Betcher and William Pollack: *In a Time of Fallen Heroes*. Guilford Press, New York 1996.

## Chapter 2 Somebody to love

### Introduction

"When one has become fully conscious of the necessity of the beginning in philosophy, the situation of the philosopher seems totally catastrophic and hopeless. Where should one start? How can one start philosophising within new areas and in a fully new way? How to liberate oneself from the whole of our worthy scientific culture? Indeed, how to break out of the knowledge that is contained in our language? (...) This difficult problem, 'the problem of the beginning', in reality occupied Husserl through twenty years of work." (Ingarden 1970:118-9, my trans.).

*"Hairy Adam sells women's magazine.* As the storm of protests against the Pamela [soft porn] posters has died down, a new advertisement campaign [in Oslo] has created angry reactions. This time there is no doubting the parallels to the meat market. The eye-catching poster picturing a man's body, partitioned in pieces like Ferdinand the ox on the poster in the butcher's shop, hangs around on the subway trains. The Consumer Ombudsman has received several angry letters on the subject." (*Aftenposten* 8. June 1995:9). The paper goes on to tell that none of the women's

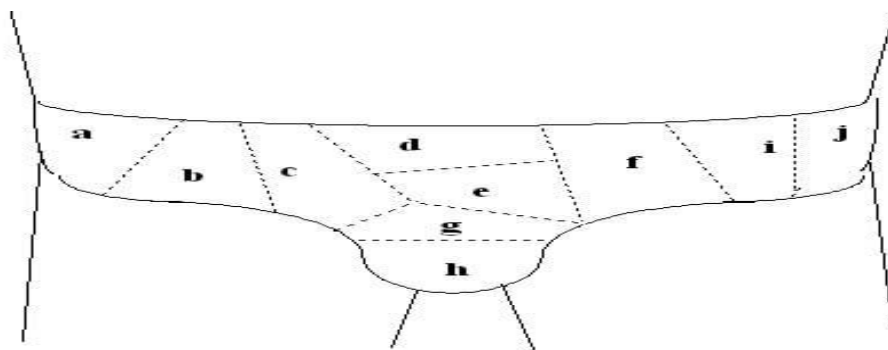
organisations of Norway are among the protesters. The ad has the following text and design (see the figure below):

"Select a real piece" (on the man's underwear).

"Girls, now it is your turn to pick or drop" (headline).

"In [magazine] for June we serve up 10 handsome single boys you can call and get to know" (headline).

### Man as 'meat piece collection'



The truth-space of love: People search for love, not for each other as meat pieces, even if the latter sometimes seems to be the way to the former. Taking love, now, seriously: how would the world, and how would I, appear, if perceived from within its space of truth? How do I look when I am in love? How do I see you? How do *we* relate, beyond this mutual looking, evaluation, or appraisal? Does this 'we' exist at all? If this whole truth-space, beyond rationality, is fully mystical, not to be touched by science, how come scientists, like anyone else, strive for it?

Where do we start, approaching complex phenomena like 'gender' and 'patriarchy'?

According to participation-oriented social theory, the place to start is in the real processes of society, rather than abstract concepts. If we want to understand 'gender', we should start studying how femininities and masculinities are practised in social relations. This is a *practice and relations approach*.

Further, we may look at gender as a key to norms, roles, positions. We investigate the relatively manifest, stable and formative clusters of relations that create specific institutions, in areas like partner selection and family formation. This is an *institutional approach*.

For understanding gender as part of modernity, we should look at how gender intersects with main phenomena of importance and particularity in the modern world, including relations of social class and other relations of power. Our focus should be the distinctive form of social relationship characterising the modern world, usually seen as economic, universalistic, instrumental, etc., and how it structures intimate relationships as specifically 'gendered' and 'sexualised' intimacies. This is usually called a *critical approach*, and the main target of critique has been capitalism, class society or the commodity.

However, class or power theory is not sufficient for understanding gender, which has a point of critique on its own, that of male dominance and patriarchy. This is a *feminist* approach.

In my own case, I first attempted to combine these approaches, focused on practice, relations, institutions, commodity relations and patriarchal organisation, in a study of commercial partner selection. This was an interview and observation study of people in bars, discotheques and other 'pick-up' places (Holter 1980a). It concerned practices that seemed to combine value and sensuality, in bodies measured in attractiveness. I came to see it as a strange inner landscape, questioning who owned this territory and what was 'right' there. If gender should be studied in a market world, in a specifically modern context, this seemed the place to start, for here femininities and masculinities themselves became marketable. Yet if partner selection resembles a market, it was not an ordinary, monetary market, but rather a sphere of non-monetary exchange. My focus, therefore, was not outright prostitution nor pornography, but the 'normal affair' with some subdued element of both, some normal 'subjectification' of the man and normal 'objectification' of the woman. I felt that it was important to study what went on here, in order to understand why love so often is fraught with failure, 'nuclear', 'divorcive' or crisis-ridden. I wanted to analyse the implicit commensurability of gender and money, brought out in the practices of attraction and repulsion, and to examine the value character of gender of gender itself. The study had a distinct target. Gender, I felt, is 'pure use value' only to the sentimental, or the idealist; our practices clearly bring other aspects to the forefront.

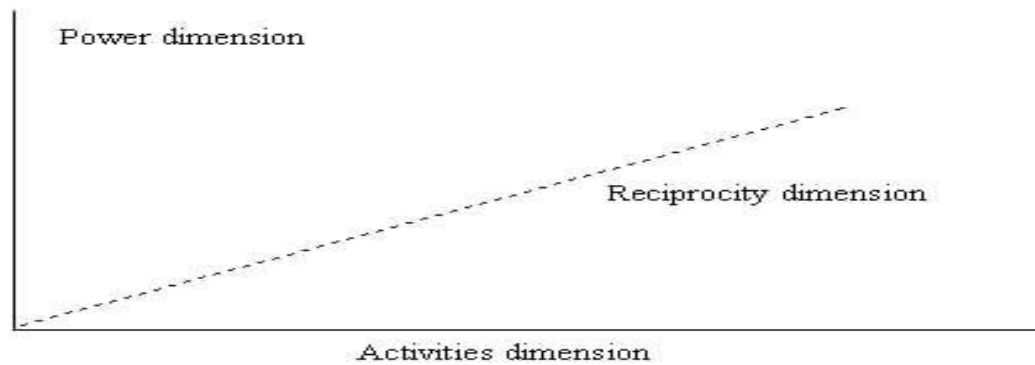
From this point of departure, I developed a theory of the 'gender market' as a public sphere *sui generis* within private life, a realisation zone of gendered privacy, manifested in a hierarchy of attractiveness, surrounded by 'serial monogamies', break-ups and retries. Here gender went public, so to speak, on its own premises. If women's private life contribution to men is bound by *the sexual contract* (Pateman, C 1988), or consists of *love power*, more than labour power as such (Jonasdottir, A 1991), the gender market can be interpreted as the scenery for the historical realisation of this power. This approach is discussed in the present chapter, starting with an overview of studies of partner selection and a discussion of why this field is important for gender relations in general.

This means starting from gender in the sense of 'practice'. Yet practice by itself, as such, a notion sometimes advocated by critical theory, is an essentialist concept, very impractical. Practices are always formed or influenced by the kinds of reciprocity that they are part of. An understanding of gender as practice, then, necessitates an inquiry into how gender is formed activity in a specific context.

The 'analysis space' may therefore be briefly introduced, as is done in the figure below. If activities can be seen as a width dimension and power as a height dimension in this space, there is also a depth dimension of reciprocity. Gender interaction, I shall argue, can be meaningfully interpreted in this framework.

### **Three social form dimensions**





## Finding the other

There is a curious incongruity between the pronounced importance of 'gender' in gender studies and related fields – and the lack of studies of one major form of gender practice, that related to falling in love, finding 'the other', starting a relationship. Gender researchers believe that people *are* important for each other in terms of gender, yet there are not so many studies of how people in fact *meet* as genders, and what kinds of effort go into these meetings. The studies that exist are not, as one might have expected, a core area of empirical research for feminist and gender theory, instead, most of them can be found in quite peripheral fields in this context – in partner selection research, studies of dating (in the US), in interpersonal attraction studies, and in a part of family studies.

I believe there is a quite simple but also subtle reason for this: there is something *awkward* about partner selection, especially when the commercial connections become obvious. There is something unpleasant with the way gender is displayed here, expressed in popular phrases like 'the meat market'. There is an implied disrespect of the person and the person's privacy. It appears also on a more theoretical level, in gender and women's studies. If the family only needs an egalitarian gender revision in order to regain its position as 'holy family', there is a danger of blasphemy here.

A psychosocial defence mechanism can be found not only in the comparative silence surrounding people's main gender meeting, but also in the texts describing it. This includes my own work on the subject. As I said, in retrospective, there are doubts that appear especially where the results seem most interesting. My point, here, is that there are common psychological obstacles to the kind of practical 'gender meeting' analysis that I propose, and that these relate to the way love is supposed to be, compared to what in fact it is, and, further, to a defence of the perceived individuality of the person.

A focus on gender meetings meant starting with the culture and practice of modern love, and in the Norwegian context the practice of '*sjekking*', as in the American sense of check, check up on: 'to investigate in order to determine the condition, validity etc. of something'. The Norwegian slang word connotes somewhat fast, stereotypical and commercial partner selection practices, performed by men especially. The word has the negative associations just referred to, yet it is nevertheless commonly used to characterise public-place partner selection practice, even more so today than in 1980.

Bars, clubs, discotheques etc. are therefore often called places for 'checking (up)' ('*sjekkesteder*'). The practice is focused on finding someone to love or have sex with, with a somewhat diffuse border between these two goals.

Some quotes from the interviews may bring in the atmosphere of this study. From the interview with Anja, office worker, 24 years old:

"The feeling I get is that girls who go out alone – if I see girls going out alone, well, at least in that place, they don't go out to have a good time but really just to find a man ('mannfolk'). – Yes, when you go to those places you often see the same faces – so it is an unknown person but a known face, you know (...) there are scarcely any *deep-going* discussions, rather the contrary (...) They go for the women ('legger an på damene') in a wholly natural way, really. By being nice and seeming interesting. (...) The first impression of course plays a large role; if you do not have your appearance in your favour, unless you are a very outwards person, you won't get into contact with anyone – . But, really, that does not suffice, if you are a zero. (...) You should not arrive at nine. You should be there by a quarter past ten. You should not leave too late or when it closes, at one. For if you have just come by and shown yourself and left, people know you have been there (..)

Impression – yes, I really do want to make an impression, the problem is just that I tend to lose interest when I notice that the interest is there, at the other end. Then it is like – as if this is not so dangerous, for then you have got the knowledge you wanted – yes, that you do attract interest, you are attractive (lit. tasty, '*faller i smak*'). (...) Mostly it is, like, smirking talk ('*pjatteprat*') between the genders – when the focus is on picking someone up ('*i sjekkeøyemed*'), that is how it gets....you should sit tight and smile nicely and – you should not scream and cry around you, but you may come forward with your opinions and points of view (...). You should smile, lots of it, but not a stupid grin, there should be something behind it. There should be a meaning behind it."

Fridtjof, 26, functionary, says:

"Well, as I said, it depends on the kind of girl you are trying to attract. But – mainly it is the degree of success. That is what you sell."

Anja, quoted above, also says:

"Of course they should look OK in my eyes, one does not contact people one does not like looking at. And that they have something more ('*er noe ved dem*') (..) you soon notice where you have them, by what they choose to talk about.

- You look for the self-assurance of men?

Yes, I could say that."

Hilde, 21, factory worker, says:

"Yes, there is a side of me I never show [at the 'sjekking' place], I believe. It is that – that sad side of me. (..) When I am at home by myself I can cry and be sad. I cry a lot, really. But I think almost all people do that. When they are by themselves."

The negative associations of '*sjekking*' relate to the substitutability of partners and the superficiality of love associated with it, and also to men's dominance. It was the young men who 'checked up the dames' as the Norwegian expression went, implicating some elevation of status for the women, even if this practice was also despised, among women especially, and held to be unworthy compared to true love. In the study, young working class women were particularly outspoken in describing it as a dubious and alienating road to love, an insincere game – and yet a fact of life, something one just had to go through, or accommodate oneself to, in order to find a partner.

In the traditional US system of dating, young women should behave so as to attract the eye and interest of men, who would then propose a restaurant dinner or other public place meeting, paid for by the man. The institution of dating was analysed by Willard Waller (1937) in the 1930s in terms of a '*rating/dating complex*', a complex with some similarity to the patterns of 'conspicuous consumption' first described by Thorstein Veblen (1976), but now in the field of love. Waller described how, instead of parents' negotiations for suitable marriage partners, young middle and upper class men and women had to deal for themselves in the emerging dating system; where family heads formerly negotiated, now individuals did.

Waller found a close link between dating and social class considerations, a rating system where dating candidates were evaluated in terms of status and attractiveness. He wrote a book on family dynamics from this perspective, which was important for developing the family sociology field in the US. Yet his views of individualised exchange and exploitation were never fully accepted. Waller characterised the attractiveness standard in terms of class ideals: "the glitter of class and the dream of power and wealth are for many the only type of love of which they are capable" (quoted in Holter 1980a:39). Waller's critique of American love practices was "strong stuff, too strong for post-WW2 dating sociologists who tried to reject Waller and defend the American love ideal that in the postwar world became the nation's most important cultural export article. In a posthumously revised edition of Waller's book there was an attempt to remove the term 'exploitation' – scarcely the most popular in McCarthy-period USA – yet sadly the editor could not find another, as he writes." (Holter 1980a:39, cf. Waller rev. ed. 1952.)

Since the study of '*sjekking*' and the gender market appeared in 1980, studies from the US and other countries have broadened the empirical knowledge in this field. I shall review some main findings from these studies.

The link between love and social class has continued to be a theme of some controversy in the field. Some studies find a close connection (Townsend & Levy 1990, Sprecher, S 1989) while others make it more distant (Gordon, M 1981). Townsend and Levy's conclusions (1990) are representative of many interpersonal attraction studies:

"After viewing photographs of 3 opposite sex individuals, which had been pre-rated for physical attractiveness and paired with 3 levels of occupational status and income, 382 male and female college students indicated their willingness to engage in relationships of varying levels of sexual intimacy and marital potential with the portrayed individuals. Analysis indicates that the effects of status on females' responses were relatively weak for casual encounters and dating, but once questions began to mention sex and/or marriage, females began to differentiate the highly attractive and medium attractive photos on the basis of their ascribed level of status. As level of status varied, so did female willingness to engage in a relationship (...) It is concluded that men apparently decide on the basis of physical attractiveness alone whether they want to have intercourse with a person; women need more information: they are more likely to prefer or insist that sexual intercourse occur in relationships that involve affection and marital potential, and place more emphasis on partners' socioeconomic status. Consequently, men's status and willingness and ability to invest affection and resources in relationships may often outweigh the effects of their physical attractiveness in women's selection of partners."

Most of the experimental studies have been carried out in a US middle class context, yet studies from other countries give similar results. One US experimental study concludes that "male raters tended to respond largely to physical attractiveness, while females tended to respond to socioeconomic status" (Kureshi & Husain 1983). The rule that appears can be summarised as one that compares what *she is* to what *he has*.

It is commonly found that the rating code has become more informal and personal. Therefore, studies that oppose external rating factors to personality factors often find an increased emphasis on the latter (Hansen and Hicks 1980). There is no doubt, however, that social class continues to play a role in dating and partner selection, and that the code has a somewhat different content among women and among men.

If social class is important, it is not usually present right away; understanding modern partner selection means understanding the *particularity* of the code in this field. Here we approach the issue of reciprocity form. If there is a commercial element in partner selection, it differs from the overt commercialisation for example in prostitution.

The presence of a commercial element in partner selection is better evidenced by international qualitative and quantitative studies than the direct presence of class considerations, even if the two are connected. This is usually brought out in the exchange mechanisms in the selection itself and in the commodity logic aspect of participants' behaviour and experience of it. Research has generally uncovered that partner selection is characterised by an impersonal attractiveness standard. "Everyone prefers the most attractive partner possible, independently of personal factors including the participant's own social desirability", Berscheid and Walster concluded from a dating study (1978:185; see further Spreadbury and Reeves 1978; Wiseman 1976; Murstein 1971; Huston 1974). A French 1980s study concludes that:

"The formation of a couple is similar to an economic exchange, in which potential spouses are commodities available on a marriage market. Choosing a partner is a type of economic struggle, in which each actor seeks to preserve his identity on the social and sexual levels" (de Singly 1987).

Similar views are common in partner selection research, especially in the research on specific new institutions like contact advertisement and computerised selection services. Yet these are also one-sided interpretations. Understanding partner selection requires an analysis of why potential partnerships do *not* only conform to the standards of exchange, why *love* is not quite the same as maximum interest, and why the interaction also presupposes some break with the logic of exchange.

Such diverging elements are brought out, for example, in the emphasis given to friendship and shared interests and activities in selecting a partner. As the level of gender segregation within couples has decreased somewhat, '*sharing*' reasons generally have become more important than 'other' reasons for partner selection (Moxnes, K 1989). Several studies confirm this 'sharing' trend, for example as expressed in partners' increased emphasis on being able to talk together, to communicate openly, not least about their jobs, and similar traits (Holter 1990c; 1994b; Dainton and Stafford 1993). Instead of the 'connections' of the partner's family, the personal resources of the partner have become a main matter, even if these also, indirectly, involve class connections.

Family sociology has often emphasised the conflict between the 'sharing' and 'connection' aspect of couple formation, especially in a historical context (Bell, R 1966). The family heads that arranged marriages in the propertied classes acted due to connection reasons, while their sons and daughters were the ones who would have to live with the spouse on intimate terms. The rise of 'romantic love' has often been interpreted in this framework (e.g. Shorter, E 1977). In modern economic terms, there was a contradiction between the 'use value' of the partner, related to sharing, intimacy and cohabitation, as against his or her connections or 'exchange value'. Yet these elements are intermingled also in modern Western partner selection. Except for certain upper class and traditional contexts where traditional external 'connection' (and property, etc.) considerations are still quite overt, the connection element is mainly itself expressed as a 'use value' matter, i.e. as part of the 'personal' characteristics of the potential partner, appearing as 'attractiveness'.

In the gender market study, *gender attractiveness* was theorised as the *price form* of a non-monetary market. This theoretical approach shall be discussed later. For now, we may note that attractiveness and attraction studies generally tend to emphasise the importance of their subject for private and family life in general, and to strengthen the impression that commodity logic is important in partner selection. The discussions in this field have focused on what kinds of exchange paradigms are best fit for explaining choices, for example, 'going after the best one' *versus* 'the best one possible', rather than exchange *as such* vis-à-vis *other* logics of interaction. It may safely be said that these utilitarianist and exchange-based partner selection paradigms generally have tended to underestimate the importance of de-alienation and non-commodity patterns, even if the data often bring such aspects clearly into view (for US exceptions, cf. Schwartz & Lever 1976, 1976b). People generally do not 'fall in love' due to exchange evaluations, but, precisely, because there is a perceived break-out from them, even if this transcendence also paradoxically fulfils the exchange (Holter 1981a:143).

If the 'rating' code is still effective, it has changed form since Waller studied it in the 1930s. The dating system in the US has changed especially in the last decades. In a

longitudinal study of US women born in the 1920s, late marriages (in the 1940s and 50s) was found to be connected with late marriage in the family of origin, with middle class rather than working class culture, with women's wage work, with emotionally distant relations to the father, resistance to parental authority, as well as social status with peers (Elder, G 1972). In another early 1970s study, support was found for Waller's dating/rating hypothesis, and a double standard was found among male students especially (Hobart, C 1974). Different gender power bases were still prevalent in 1980s dating (Sprecher, S 1985). Several studies have found that selection practices vary with age; yet even if younger adolescents are more 'superficial' in their selection criteria, older participants are more concerned with career and future plans (Roscoe et.al. 1987). These and other studies imply that even if asymmetrical gender and social class considerations change with age, they do not disappear. A study of high school teenagers in Connecticut (Miller and Gordon 1986) found a "retreat from formal patterns associated with pluralistic dating in general and popularity rating and dating in particular". The researchers found a trend "toward more informal, less sex-role stereotyped and less competitive dating behaviour". According to other studies, however, the competitive element has not disappeared, and it is related to loneliness (Stephan et.al. 1988) and jealousy (Hansen, G 1985).

Over the last fifteen years, US as well as European studies have found an increasing element of female activity and initiation in partner selection relationships. An early 1990s US study concluded that a sizeable proportion of females (though smaller than that among the males) "acknowledge having had multiple sex partners and sex without emotional involvement". There was also an "increased proportion of females engaging in the traditional male roles of initiating sexual involvement and dates and paying date expenses" (Lottes, I 1993).

In many ways, the US patterns of partner selection have become more like the Western European patterns, whereas in Europe, the once controversial and 'free' Scandinavian patterns (cf. the image of the sexualised 'Swedish woman') have become more of a general rule. At the same time, gender segregation (Hirdmann, Y 1988) remains; one recent study (Peters, J 1994) concludes that from the perspective of teenagers, stereotypical gender roles are being perpetuated in North American home life. Sons do outside chores, and to a lesser degree, daughters do inside chores and have an earlier curfew.

The traits of the code are results of different considerations. Yet quantitative and demographic studies, especially, tend to affirm the existence of a number of 'ground rules' in terms of social class on the one hand, and gender on the other, linked to physical attractiveness. For example, studies confirm the tendency towards an 'appropriate' height difference between partners. Also, partners in new couples tend to match in weight, while they differ more in older couples (Schafer and Keith 1990). Norwegian studies support the hypothesis that 'like attracts like' (i.e. homogamy, also in terms of social class) is more important than the principle that 'difference attracts' (Moxnes, K 1989).

These main traits appear throughout different cultural and national contexts. For example, in a 1970s study of a huge computer contact service in the USSR, it was found that "tolerant behaviour was greater in females seeking a partner than in males, while the active capacity to make personal contacts was significantly greater in the

male sample" (Prokopec, J 1977). This is not very different from practices elsewhere. A 1980s Finnish study concluded that a woman's 'reproductive competence' was evaluated in terms of a 'healthy and attractive body' (Natkin, R 1984; cf. Barret, M 1980); once more the conclusion seems generally applicable.

In the study of '*sjekking*', I described the interaction as an *expression* of a wider pattern where the commodity exchange aspects of the modern gender system come to the foreground. The pattern was displayed in a number of new or mostly new institutions, where women as well as men were *free to choose* a partner and marriage-like relationship without paternal or other direct patriarchal intervention. It was this background pattern, rather than the '*sjekking*' arenas ('meat markets') themselves, which I called 'the gender market'.

I analysed partner selection in this context as a stair-wise process with five distinct steps.

(1) There is a first step of '*preparation*', often with the women paying main attention to their appearance while men attend to their courage, so to speak, by drinking alcohol.

(2) The second step is one of '*market presentation and evaluation*'. In a public arena like a discotheque, this phase is characterised by a 'game of glances', of looks and visibility, in which participants work hard at appearing at ease ('just themselves', 'simply natural') while looking for an attractive potential partner. Interviews and later studies have brought out that many participants, women especially, dislike being evaluated in this manner; in fact, this is one reason why many select contact advertisements and similar avenues instead of going to clubs or other face-to-face public arenas (Holter 1990a). The presentation phase is often initiated by women demonstrating availability, for example by dancing together while the men sit around, watching.<sup>1</sup>

(3) The third step is one of '*initiation of contact*', a yes/no situation that also requires 'defensive measures' against the possibility of being rejected. Often, there is a lot of seemingly incidental *circulation* at this point. Many find it much more difficult to take initiative in this situation than in others, and there is a market for 'good advice' in this area.<sup>2</sup> In order to understand what goes on here, neither the utilitarianist (exchange only) nor the sentimentalist (use value only) framework will do on their own, since the main trait is a *tension* between them.

On this and the subsequent steps, many participants 'fall off' the stairs, and so there is some mutual interest in making the situation appear as something other than a partnership negotiation.

(4) If the negotiation is successful, the fourth step involves a '*privatisation*' of the new relationship, some form of closing off from the surroundings. This usually means a willingness on both sides to "try it out", to get to know each other better.

At this point, the different reciprocity considerations in partner selection come forth more clearly. A participant's initial considerations in the gender market create a *series*

of possibilities. Potential partners are seen as more or less attractive persons. The personality of the other person is of interest primarily as expression of attractiveness.

(5) Now, however, this '*best one*' is, potentially, '*the right one*', 'the only one'. Some form of *transcendence* from the rather freezing level of anonymous evaluation and comparison is needed, if the negotiation is to develop into a love relationship. This is often experienced as a sudden shift, "falling in love", and even if it happens gradually, there is a principal change of scenery. There is much evidence to the effect that some kind of break of anonymity, unexpected emotional closeness, and similar phenomena facilitate this change.

If the potential partnership on these last steps has been formed through the normal rules of the preceding ones, it is still an exchange relationship, a market connection. However, this connection has now changed its form, or even been turned upside down. As a participant on the first steps, I may have had eyes for many potential partners; now, the person in front of me becomes *the* one for me; falling in love means I also fall out of a comparative framework.

In economic terms, the *extended* exchange form of the first phases of the selection process is one of person A facing persons B, C, D etc. There is a series of offers and a continuous comparison. This is now replaced by a *dyadic* relation, or what Marx called an 'elementary' or 'incidental' exchange relation, which resembles a *gift relation* and may be changed in that direction (cf. Appendix 1).

Although exchanges may be fulfilled also without this turnaround, especially in the sense of 'sex/companionship for a night', couple formation usually requires a transcendence at least from the most overt market logic. At the same time, however, this transcendence is relative, rather than absolute; if the initiation phase was based on market criteria, the love phase fulfils them, even if these criteria are now present, so to speak, *in absentia*, in inverted form – becoming just as intensely *personal* as they were *impersonal* and anonymous in the first place. In this sense, the gender market is a 'filter' where class and gender considerations, expressed in terms of attraction and attractiveness, ensures or hinders further contact, and thereby the *possibilities* for a more personal relationship. 'Sentimentalist' or 'use value only' views of partner selection usually focus only on what happens *within* this affirmative framework. Yet for each case of a *yes* in the gender market, there is a long series of *no*, *not interested*. There is a negative zone surrounding the dyad, even if only implied, a repulsion at the back of attraction. This is brought out in a word sometimes used especially when single people describe couples: '*twosomeness*', two lonelines combined. This repulsion field is generally an understudied topic in selection research.

How important are these market-like patterns in partner selection? In the 1980 study, I argued that the gender market had become the dominant framework of partner selection in a country like Norway, especially among young, urban men and women. Later studies have tended to confirm that impression. A large, and probably increasing, proportion of prospective partners meets each other in fairly anonymous and exchange-like circumstances and starts a relationship without much knowledge of the other. Further, the idea that the couple is based on a 'contract' that can be dissolved, rather than a bond for life, has become more, rather than less, predominant, together with the idea that the partner is basically substitutable.



Yet the distinction between 'freedom' and 'exchange' is hardly clear in this area. We may argue that the *object* of negotiations in partner selection, namely the services and activities later performed in the relationship, are real, practical matters, and so this is certainly an economic transaction in the sense of involving a major work relationship for women especially. We also know that social class considerations remain important in the selection process. Still, none of this, by itself, warrants a market view of partner selection, or the extension of this view which I shall explore, namely that *gender itself* may be approached, on a deeper level, as a phenomenon associated with the commodity reciprocity form.

Rather, it is in-depth studies of partner selection itself that tend to confirm this market dominance view. As a follow-up to the first study, I did a study in the late 1980s of a well-known 'liberal' contact column called *Somebody for me* ('Noen som passer for meg') in a Norwegian daily newspaper. The contact letters (N=439) were classified in terms of traits 'wanted' and 'offered' as well as according to a textual analysis of the relationship type and position involved (Holter 1990a). This column, where readers' letters were allowed some length and published for free, was noted for its seriousness and egalitarianism. I therefore felt that it should be well suited to *disprove* the unwarranted 'economistic' view, which according to some critics characterised my gender market approach. A key element in the study, relating to gender as practice, was the inclusion of the *response scores* to the letters (N=4174 response letters), an inclusion which is still fairly unusual in this field.

The results were surprising. My gender market hypotheses were partly disconfirmed – on the level of words. The column letters were remarkably un-market-like, personal and egalitarian in tone, sometimes to the extent that the sex of the writer was only implicated, with a stated wish to meet a 'life companion' for friendship. Also, the attractiveness and exchange angle was often only implicitly presented.

On the level of actions, however, things were different. The response scores gave a picture that was quite unlike the one given by the column letters themselves. Young women who signalled good looks in their letters received *far more* responses than any other group in the column (around ten times more), and those who added a romantic or traditional feminine attitude got even more. There was a similar, but somewhat less dramatic, tendency that men who signalled social status and financial security received more responses than other men. Behind the facade, then, beauty plus a dose of submission was a main attractor of male responses, while status and money attracted female responses. Further, I found that these stereotypical gender selection criteria varied *positively* with social class, not negatively, as some middle-class researchers tend to assume – a variation notable among the male responders especially, but also among the female. This trait confirmed the class differences that were uncovered, in more qualitative terms, in the 1980 study. In Waller's terms, the higher the rating of the participants, the greater their gender-stereotypical conformity.

Similar results are obtained in other recent studies, even if these do not include response scores. A contents study of classified 'lonely hearts' advertisements in a UK fortnightly magazine (Greenlees & McGrew 1994) showed that "men, more than women, sought cues to reproductive value (i.e., physical appearance and youth), whereas women, more than men, sought cues revealing an ability to acquire resources (i.e., actual and potential financial security and age). Women also sought to ascertain

a man's willingness to provide resources (in the form of time, emotions, money, and status) in a relationship". Even highly universalistic and sociobiological study designs find indubitable social factors in arenas like contact advertising – "males were more likely than females to seek physically attractive mates, to request a photo, and to offer financial resources and honesty/sincerity. Females were more likely to seek financial resources and offer an appealing body shape", Michael Wiederman (1993) reports from a recent US advertisement content study.

In a longitudinal part of the *Somebody...* study, comparing letters published in the column in 1973 to those published in 1985, three main results appeared. Firstly, the exchange explicitness had increased (even in this subdued column), mostly in the sense that women had become more like men (asking for a photo, etc.; for similar US results cf. Stevens, G et.al. 1990). Secondly, the proportion that used the column due to a dislike of public place arenas like discos, bars and clubs had increased. Thirdly, the early 1970s language of naturalism ('I am an Adam looking for an Eve') had been replaced by an 1980s language of individualism and a more performative attitude ('I have a little bit of everything'; 'I am what I make myself out as'). Gender itself had become more of a question of individual performance. Its importance had not diminished, however. Especially, the textual analysis of the column letters showed the continued existence of gender differentiation in terms of the implicit structuring of a future relationship. There was a marked tendency towards what I called 'strong structuring' (inviting the other to be included in one's own life world) on the men's side, and a tendency towards 'weak structuring' (signalling willingness to become part of someone else's world) on the women's side.

The embarrassment discussed earlier thereby reappeared. In the 1980 study, people who frequently visited '*sjekking*' places nevertheless said their *ideal* was to meet the other person in quite different circumstances – as far away, in fact, from these places as possible: out in the woods, or even in the mountains, traversing a glacier. If the reality was somehow dirty, too close to unworthy phenomena like sex for money, the ideal, all the more was one of purity and cleanliness. This reemerged in the contact column study as a matter of clean words, dirty practices. Why is it dirty? More will be said regarding that issue later, but an initial, everyday line of thought probably goes like this: "How can I be a person in my own eyes, or relate to myself personally, when I select another person for intimate contact in this impersonal manner?" Or this: "After all, this is not a matter of buying a car, or of investing in shares, but the most personal side of life." – Many kinds of answers can be given here, or one can attempt to avoid such questioning entirely. Through all this, however, there is a sense in which some matters are best shut out, kept from view, and I believe there is a general lesson to be learned here, regarding gender studies and 'gender politics'. Certainly, gender is more than avoidance, but for a realist examination of those further aspects, this aspect must be faced.

The impression that the gender market has become more widespread and more of a general context of partner selection in the period since 1980 seems warranted by many cultural trends. What was still perceived as somewhat special fifteen or twenty years ago, today is just seen as normal, as divorce rates and trends towards 'serial monogamy' have continued to rise. Today, instead, the moral indignation is focused on even more *overt* sex/money connections, like phone prostitution and massage institutes that have become more widespread in Norway as elsewhere. Over the last

30 years, the number of places serving alcohol in Oslo has increased from about a hundred to more than seven hundred, and even if many trends are expressed in these figures, they also reflect a lifestyle where gender market patterns are more widespread than before. Further, Norwegian family statistics give the impression that the 'traditional' rural family patterns (notably in the western and southern parts of the country), with low divorce rates, a relatively high number of children, etc., have mostly eroded over the last generation. In Norway as elsewhere, the family sphere 'traditionalists' have become more similar to the urban, young, educated, middle-class 'non-traditionalists' of the 1970s.

## The selection arenas

Willard Waller's work is especially interesting for being located on the threshold between the old world of family negotiation and the new one of individual negotiation – one that soon became perceived as, simply, the way things are. My own approach to partner selection was influenced by his historical perspective. I saw the gender market as part of a specific social and historical context, and not a set of ahistorical attraction rules supposedly operative anywhere. It was a 'tendency' that gradually became manifest in a number of historically quite specific institutions, as well as in wider, yet still specific aspects of everyday interaction and public life. Women's subject status and freedom of movement in public areas – as a fact, not just a formality – were basic prerequisites for this tendency.

The concrete selection arenas vary according to cultural differences and other circumstances. Since Americans usually make a date first, and go out later, the notion of the check-up or picking-up place ('*sjekkestedet*'), will partly be foreign, or with more stigma attached to it (single's bars, etc.). In the European context, especially among young urban people, this is simply the 'normal' place to go, and there is only a diffuse border between places catering mainly to established couples, and those focused on finding a lover; usually, some of both are present.

The gender market arenas are of two main types, immediate and non-immediate. In the immediate arena, there is the possibility to form a couple there and then, in the mediated arena, this is not possible. The immediate arena type primarily consists of arenas with face-to-face contact, but also of telephone contact services, data links, and similar where both are present 'live'. A newspaper contact column belongs to the non-immediate arena type. The 'picking-up place' as a general category defines a public arena that involves a congregation of people with face-to-face contact.

Gender market arenas, together with less overt or formalised gender market aspects in everyday life, *constitute a public space*. This is of some theoretical importance, since femininity and masculinity usually appear in private and individual circumstances, even if we have good reasons to approach gender also as a societal pattern. If gender is 'societal', here it 'goes public' on its turf, in its own terms; this is a public sphere (Germ. *Öffentlichkeit*) which is different from the public sphere in general, and characterised, rather, by the internal dynamics of the gender system. Clearly, what happens, then, is of some general importance for understanding gender, in the sense of the 'lens' mentioned above; all the more curious, therefore, the comparative silence in gender and feminist theory on this issue.

The public arenas of the gender market exist in a complex interrelationship with the market tendencies outside the institutionalised market proper. The overt market arena is a societal institution, a centre of cultural images, sometimes counterpoised to the individual's feeling of self, but also, often, sanctioning and norm-setting for the rest of the gender system. One common motive for visiting this arena is as a test of real-terms attractiveness. The arena interaction thereby sets standards for attractiveness and for appropriate ways of approaching the opposite gender, as well as for the meaning of self in this relationship.

These manifest arenas are however only a minor part of the gender market, considered as an interactional pattern. As a whole, the gender market may be defined as the subsphere of the gender system characterised by potential or real partnership exchange. Everyone knows that this activity may be carried out only symbolically or implicitly, and also that it may be realised within other formal contexts or other institutions. One does not have to date, or go to a disco, in order to 'meet someone'. It may occur in non-public circumstances that otherwise are similar to public market arenas, like private parties. All these together, and especially the whole layer of potential partner selection-associativity in the gender system, i.e. as 'aspect' of everyday interaction, create the gender subsystem category I call the gender market, where the sex difference is made socially relevant in a specific context of exchange. This context, due to its key position towards the gender system as a whole, makes sex relevant, or constructs gender, in a way that can clarify some major conditions of gender in general. As we shall see, however, this construction matter goes far deeper than the traits usually associated with exchange paradigms.

The comparatively clear-cut character of attraction rules in partner selection processes sometimes makes researchers forget that other rules are also present. This relates to other forms of reciprocity, of which more will be said later. It also involves more specific patterns, like those connected to socialisation experiences and more or less reworked parental images (Stierlin, H 1974). The attractiveness pyramid creates a zone of possibility that seems to be wider in the lower than in the upper classes, and wider for women than for men. Inside this 'good enough' zone, other criteria apply, related to the 'type' of person (and to what Bourdieu calls the *habitus*), to childhood experiences (see e.g. Lafferty & Gulbrandsen 1979), to wider gender-political trends (cf. chap. 12), and to other issues. Throughout, the 'transferential' character of the transfer is of major importance: falling in love is a fantasy as well as a reality, involving activity and self-reformulation on many levels.

The specificity of the gender market is its 'thinness', a squeeze into which all these personal issues are put, a field of tension where the private, in glimpses, becomes manifest and public. Being oneself 'as a person' and as 'an attractive person' is not, as I said, always a happy communion or even a manageable dual existence. The personal has a tendency to become negatively impersonal as it is translated to "attractive" or "not attractive". In this perspective, so-called interpersonal attraction is better interpreted as an impersonal force; what psychologists have measured in this area is people's willingness to engage in personal contact based on pre-personal or anonymous knowledge, mainly consisting of a visual image only or a superficial introduction to the other. While all kinds of personal tendencies may be found in selection arenas, becoming 'public' for some moments, they are not inherently *related*

to this form of publicity, like the attraction rules, and the latter therefore are of special interest for understanding gender itself as a social form.

## Gender for gender – and sex for money

What distinguishes the gender market public and half-public sphere from the public sphere in general? As argued, it is indeed a public sphere by itself, although mainly as part of private life, not formally brought out; where the latter occurs, standards of exchange and market rules appear.

A main characteristic is the *partial non-transferability* of gendered resources into the outside world, including the limited possibilities for converting gender resources to monetary resources. On the other hand, there are limits on bringing in outside resources into this sphere. One does not have to be a programming expert in order to recognise that we are now approaching some rather important traits of the 'code' of gender. As the gender market extends, this kind of barrier may seem to become smaller. Also, men's and women's resources have become less dissimilar than before. This, however, does not imply a larger direct access for public or production sphere resources, money especially, into the gender market public sphere, or vice versa. Rather, what we have witnessed over the last generation is a gradual process towards more market-related standards within the gender system itself, including the tendencies towards more serial monogamies and more contractual definitions of marriage. In a country like Norway, various forms of prostitution, overt connections of sexuality and intimacy on the one hand and money on the other, have also increased.

Yet the rise of the gender market may help explain a seeming paradox of modern gender and family relations development – a tendency towards increasing gender equality on the one hand, and an extension of money-for-sex zones of interaction on the other hand, including pornography as well as prostitution. Greater gender equality, or men's reactions against it, do not adequately explain the latter phenomena. If a male feeling of loss of power or a perception of inadequacy are sometimes expressed in interviews with men who use prostitutes, what emerges as a main setting in these men's minds is an *as if scenery*, *as if* this interaction was a normal gender market interaction (Priour & Taksdal 1989; also among rapists: Ringheim, G 1987). If whore buyers in many (but probably not all) respects are 'normal men', as a number of studies conclude, what they want is the 'normal relationship', to the extent that prostitution is imagined in a make-believe scenery of normal gender attraction. Here, as in the gender market itself, *money* is a matter of some embarrassment, something to be denied or politely hidden away, since money, presented *as* money, tends to break with the logic of balanced attractiveness of the normal gender market pattern. Yet this normal pattern has itself gradually developed towards greater commerciality, more individualist and competitive strategies and norms regarding a partner relationship, and, most probably, a greater willingness to estrange or alienate part of oneself in order to reach one's goals. Even if a tendency towards increasing gender equality therefore makes prostitution and pornography 'less natural' options, this inner gender system process of commercialisation and alienation (together with similar tendencies elsewhere in society) makes it 'more natural'. These tendencies are also confirmed, I believe, in the character of prostitution and 'normal' (non-violent, etc.) pornographic material; the woman should not be a passive object, but rather 'want it herself'.

The partial non-transferability of resources within the gender market public sphere is expressed in the sanctions against certain actions, primarily actions substituting money for personal attractiveness. These appear also when the man does in fact use money, in the rituals and symbolism connected to treating (Holter 1981a:105-18). In principle, the gender market does not allow sex exchanged for money; it only allows love as a gift for love. In the terms of the *sphere analysis* further presented later (chap. 9, 10), domestic sphere activity capacities (whether we regard them as 'reproductive labour power' or as 'love power') cannot be bought and sold, and do not represent an object for its owner that can legitimately serve as wage labour object.

In a cultural sense, a market creates its own theory, its own 'liberalism', and here it centres on two individuals who fall in love due to love itself, or due to a love of freedom at least. This love is *dyadic*, meaning that reproductive labour relates to productive labour only through a series of links connecting one person to another person, one-to-one relations. A person who participates in gender market interaction is in principle free to do so, and the initial formulation of attraction is related to the rights involved in this freedom.

The fact that the ideals of love and freedom are constantly broken in gender market interaction is, in principle, no different from the tension-filled reality of most markets, like the youth market combining co-optation and exploitation of youth images, the ambivalence of youth culture to the culture industry, and similar. In the gender market arenas, this tension takes different forms, often contrary to those of monetary market relationships, forms that are 'privatising' rather than 'publicising' in tendency.

The gender system exists within private as well as public life, and imposes its own social visibility, its own themes and meaning frameworks, in a wide variety of contexts. Common to these is the positive focus on the dyadic gender relationship, and the negative focus on non-congruent forms of transfer.

Prostitution and half-prostitution exist in the cultural and social vicinity of the gender market, as a kind of backyard. If prostitution and pornography strive towards a 'normal' gender market make-believe appearance, gender market institutions on the other hand generally have back doors towards these more overt monetary relations. Still, the relationship of prostitution to the gender market is probably better interpreted as one of deviance confirming normalcy (and vice versa), i.e. one of opposition, not direct affirmation. The same is the case with sexual violence, rape, etc.; we know theft and property go together in most areas, and this is the case here also. All these phenomena 'should not' be present in the free gender market, yet in practice, they are.

Instead, the participant should select another participant freely, for a personal relationship, based on personal reasons. The contact that creates the basis for later more personal involvement involves the abstraction of the other as gender-attractive. As a wage labour participant or producer, I should not buy domestic or reproductive labour; as a reproducer, I should not sell it. Action where money is not only symbolically displayed, as in treating, but instead actually functions as a buying sum, is not allowed. In this perspective, the gender market is seen as an *expression* of a background activity sphere relationship, further discussed in the next chapters.

The effect of all this is a dyadic system of relations involving personal contact, and, in a wider perspective, the development of a new form of sociality, 'gender interaction' as it has historically emerged as part of what is 'modern' or 'Western' in the contemporary world.

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<sup>1</sup> I have witnessed a contrary pattern only in Greece: young men taking the floor first, the women sitting around.

<sup>2</sup> It is indicative that I still get a call every second week or so from journalists who want to "do something" on this theme – due to a book published in 1981. My other research topics have never attracted this amount of media interest. As I write this, "How to succeed in '*sjekking*' and find the best places" appears over the front page of the Saturday edition of one of the largest Norwegian tabloids. Below this busy surface of how-to-be-successful advice, there is a large amount of loneliness and feelings of inadequacy.

## Chapter 3 The gender market

### Introduction

In the last chapter, I raised the question of 'where to begin' in order to approach phenomena as wide and complex as gender and patriarchy. Gender, it is often said, should be analysed in terms of *relations*, and these relations should be seen in a practice-oriented perspective. Yet all kinds of relations and all kinds of practices will not do, since the whole social world may be described in those terms, and the specific character of gender and patriarchy in modern society is not brought out just by adhering to a practice and relations perspective. So I argued that an *institutional* perspective is needed also, and, further, a perspective where institutions are seen in terms of reciprocity forms. Instead of starting with gender as an 'it', an abstract concept, therefore, I started with how people *make the sex difference socially relevant*, creating gender as a system of social relations. For now, this will be my 'working definition' of the gender system. It is rather empty and formal, sociologically speaking, yet it is both wide and precise enough to allow further inquiry.

In this chapter, I present a 'growing up and getting a family' view of what gender is about, and I locate the gender market theory in terms of three 'centres'. These are the sociological centre of the gender system in the family formation and parenting processes, the psychological centre early in childhood in each person's life course, and the central patriarchal relationships of contemporary society. I also discuss some further differences between utilitarianist views of gender-related exchange and the present view.

The last part of the chapter starts an in-depth examination of gender as a 'real abstraction' connected to the commodity form. Why is qualitative value analysis of relevance here, and what can it tell us of the meaning framework connected to gender? I discuss the two main levels of gender interaction that appear in this analysis, and the four meaning frameworks connected to them.

## A balancing act

At the centre of the gender system, in a role which is often interpreted as concrete *vis-à-vis* the abstract relations of society at large, similar to 'use value' rather than 'value', we find sex, or sex difference, which at first can be defined as the biological difference between men and women. Later we shall find that the relationship of sex to gender, and the content of these categories, are rather more complicated. For now we may say that sex, in the sense of a granted, anatomical-biological set of differences, is commonly *perceived* as a basis of gender, while gender is conceived as its social result, modulated by socialisation and other experience. Gender thereby becomes a mixed result of the natural and the social, a balancing act.

This view of gender is not as dominant as it was twenty years ago, yet it is still very common in gender studies and related fields, and the number of discussions that attempt to weigh the influence of social *vis-à-vis* natural influences must be high indeed. There is no doubt that modern gender often appears as if it was lodged in human nature, and ultimately in the biological sex difference.

The question, however, is whether this vision is a part of the gender scenery itself, as element of the ideology of a system which is perhaps no more 'biological' than the social class system, or if it represents the actual state of affairs. If the first alternative is the most likely one, as shall be argued, we still face the question of *why* biology and human nature seem to play a leading role in this particular area of social relationships; why these relationships take on this specific form of appearance.

All this obviously goes further than a discussion of the gender market in its relation to partner selection practices. It relates to the question of the market as expression of the broader tendencies associated with gender. Is it possible to untangle the gender knot from such a perspective? I shall attempt an affirmative answer in this chapter and the next one. It should be mentioned, at the outset, that the idea behind this line of approach is not to deny any biological influence on gender arrangements, but to understand why bodies and body-related traits become part of a 'code' on their own, serving as a kind of naturalised social language. Some have argued that such views lead to 'economism', misleading 'constructionism', or even 'determinism'. This is like the elephant and the mouse. Even in the most social constructionist kinds of research, it is common practice to operationalise gender in terms of biological sex. Our everyday approach to gender rests even more fully on biological determinist assumptions. Why do I act like a man? Because I *am*, of course. This is the elephant discourse, the Goliath assumption, in this context.<sup>1</sup>

## Gender and sexual orientation

The analysis of gender in this chapter and the next ones is focused on the heterosexual framework, and the relationship between gender and sexual orientation is not discussed until later (chap. 8). This does not mean that heterosexuality is taken for granted. On the contrary, I believe that it is the overriding dominance of heterosexuality, and not the comparatively marginal, suppressed existence of homosexuality, that "needs to be explained" in this context. I present a critical view, focused on the "normal" affair and a questioning of this normalcy.



This analysis does not lead to any specific normative conclusions regarding sexual orientation. The question, rather, is why these "orientations" or "files" are around in the first place. People have different eating or sleeping habits also, yet we do not put them into files for that reason. Presidential campaigns are not waged on the basis of getting the snorers out of the family sphere, although that would probably do families more good than the present issue (in the US) of getting gay people stigmatised once more. Nor do we create a social victimisation system based, say, on the size of people's earlobes. I discuss the *social overloading* of body intimacy as a *result* of a certain arrangement of patriarchy and capitalism, and I analyse the *fetishism* that occurs in its wake when this intimacy (in hetero-, homo- or whatever-version) is credited with various determinant powers on its own. It is for this purpose that I choose the dominant form of gender in the heterosexual framework as point of departure.

## Gender as key to private life

Why start with partner selection in order to investigate gender relations? One simple but also important answer is because this is where people actually start. I start here because it means following, analytically, the main practical process associated with gender in our society. This is also a reason why the heterosexual partnership and the selection process creating it can be seen as a key to analysis of the gender system as a whole; it is a main area where people approach gender in practical relational terms.

At first sight, such a proposition may look somewhat strange. Are not people feminine and masculine in many other areas – and, in their own life course, long before the partner selection process? That is true. Especially, it may be argued that the 'psychological centre' of the gender system is located in childhood, at least if seen from the point of view of each individual. The 'sociological centre', however, is a different matter; here, partner selection and the family formation process come into view.

The gendered choices made in partner selection arguably are the most '*strategical*' choices of the whole gender system, since gender attributions here are not only symbolically or informally present; their presence in the right combination is also credited with *institutional power*. This is a main sociological criterion. In this area, the right balance of gender attractions and personal contact *creates* an institution for the individuals involved (or re-creates it, on a societal level); their interaction establishes a couple relationship, perhaps a family. Partner selection can therefore be seen as a key area since the abstract feminine and masculine here are institutionalised as a *she* and *he* in a *gender dyad*, a dyad that forms the centre of the family sphere as well as its main link to wage work, consumption, and other monetary relations, and, in general, its main 'code' unit. Gendered partner selection is also, basically, family selection, while de-selection dissolves the family. The gender system thereby can be found 'beneath' more concrete interaction in the family sphere, creating some of its main background rules.

On this background, we may say that 'family' is the product of 'gender', or that the family fulfils what gender promises. It should be noted at the outset, however, that this is a somewhat one-sided view, related to the notion that gender is mainly a women's issue.<sup>2</sup> The 'product' of gender includes many aspects of wage work, public

life, the traditionally *masculine* sphere which today often appears in neutral terms. The gender relationship conditions men as well as women, although not in the same ways, and not to the same degree. The gender system values lead into family values not just on the side of femininity, but also on the side of masculinity, turning gender into an on-going relation *between* family and wage work, between family time and employed time, between not-so-clearly evaluated time and time valorised in money. With this in mind, however, we may turn to family formation as a central area of the gender system, an area of validation as well as realisation of gender, on a path that will eventually lead us through the family sphere to the 'other' gender matters mentioned.

When one examines gender as a family formation issue, some peculiarities appear. We are on a well-known ground in one sense, but also an unknown and surprising one. Introspection and phenomenological approaches are relevant in this area: what do *I* do, seeking 'somebody for me'? What does it mean, being without this somebody? My masculinity now appears as a key to contact. It appears simply as 'having/being gender', a general category or property, together with attractiveness. What matters at first is not one or the other kind of gender, but being attractively gendered as such. It is not 'dyadic' gender, masculinity *versus* femininity, which is involved here, but rather gender as a 'generic' category. This brings me to a certain threshold of possibility.

My gendered being gives me a *right*, and what is involved, subsequently, is the fulfilment of this right to *private sociality*, a sociality which is indeed *social*, private life in the sense of *life*, as opposed to loneliness, anonymity and no-one caring. True, the gender which is involved in this first step towards contact, gender in a rather monolithic sense, is often unrecognised, taken for granted, as if supplied simply by each person's bodily existence; 'if you have a sex organ, welcome!' So this part of the entrance is seldom brought into light. Yet generic gender is an important background element of the gender system as a whole, also for understanding what goes on in the more overt dyadic sense of gender, where it is presupposed. In the present context as elsewhere, the 'generic' sense of gender appears on one end of an axis with a deeply 'individual' gender at the other end, and the tension between these two becomes especially marked in partner selection: a fully abstract sense of gender *and* a fully individual sense are both involved and required for falling in love. If I do not belong to the first, generic category (where, thankfully, my body seems to put me anyway), I may perhaps be an individual in a formal sense, but I am not exactly flourishing in real life. Who will see me, from the inside, as an individual? My own lonely walls? How can I exist *as* an individual for someone? No wonder individuals accommodate themselves to some marketing of the self, if necessary for finding someone to love. Individuality is all very well, perhaps, but at the end of it, we need *someone else* to confirm it, and so this whole private life arrangement contains quite a few paradoxes for the individualist view of society. What people do, in practice, is attempting to connect individual lives in order to realise them as social lives.

What is presupposed in gender practice as well as in theory is the existence of an '*anonymous*' society, a society where personal contact and bonding are no longer 'prescribed' (and fairly public) as was the case in pre-modern society, but rather 'achieved', performatively determined. Further, this happens in highly specialised

private contexts, deeply intimate and yet with ground rules known to anyone, generic and individualised at the same time.

## Three centres

Throughout all this, the realisation of femininity and masculinity in partner selection and family formation emerges as a key to private life. As people grow up, there is a certain achievement associated with gender, and what happens earlier can be seen as a form of preparation for it. For young people growing up, there is, metaphorically speaking, a great big cultural door with a sign named 'masculinity' or 'femininity' on it; a door into adult family and work life, or a series of doors, increasingly allowing private sociality and emotional bonding, including the right to have children. The significance of partner selection is its door-opening function into this sociological centre of gender.

I shall outline some traits regarding the relationship between this sociological view, and psychological views that tend to centre gender in childhood. I also anticipate a few main points of the later discussion regarding the difference between the gender system and patriarchal structure.

The 'growing up and getting a family' sociological view of the kernel area of the gender system rests on evidence from many areas, including studies of the importance of gender over the life course. Briefly put, gender is mainly a 'prime of life' matter. Femininity and masculinity are of larger importance in peoples' life courses in the period of partner selection and family formation than either the time before, or the time after (Holter 1989a:105-8). At that time, the sexual division of labour is largest, with femininity most connected to homemaking and child care, and masculinity to career-making. Also, gender-related normative differences seem to increase, especially connected to the new activities related to giving birth and caring for small children.

In sociological terms, therefore, the centre of the gender system appears to be the family formation period and the period with young children, even if its psychological impact for the individual may be greater in childhood. This impact may, at least to a certain extent, itself be interpreted as a consequence of the adults' behaviours and experiences. Gender, in this view, is important in childhood primarily because children are born into, and 'learn', a gendered social arrangement, a family based on the gender dyad. In this sense, the child represents the 'transcending fulfilment' of gender. While the gendered (and sexualised) character of small children's behaviour remains a controversial topic, and I believe often a dubious claim, *adults'* gendered behaviour and investment in children are well documented.

When a child is born, adults first of all ask '*what is it*', a girl or a boy. This is well known, yet the '*it*' of this sentence has a significance which is not usually brought up. Later I shall connect it to a 'ledge' view of the ontological significance of gender identity. As a child becomes part of the gender order, it is no longer neutral, an '*it*'; it is symbolically lifted up into the world of social beings. From the first moments of life, therefore, gender appears as a key to social recognition, and the quality, force,

and potentially traumatic aspects of gender and sex in early childhood and the importance of 'getting things right' may be interpreted on this background.

Childhood 'gender learning' seems to be a depth process that cannot be sufficiently explained by conventional learning theory (Holter 1989a:85pp.). 'The cognitivist fallacy' of treating gender as if it was simply a matter of model learning, fails to explain what goes on. Psychologists have recently argued that gender attraction patterns are 'precognitive' (Roberts, T 1992). The 'psychodynamic fallacy' in this context means giving psychoanalysis an explanatory power which it does not have; it may explain what happens *after* a sense of gender appears, yet masculinity and femininity itself are not explained by it.<sup>3</sup> What remains, then, is the 'biology decides' position; we are back to the 'balancing act'. I believe *reciprocity analysis* may help untangle this knot, as is discussed later, focusing on value forms. Reciprocity theory, from Mauss's 'power of the gift' to Marx's 'reification', involves forms of *social identification* that go deeper than learning in the usual sense. In psychodynamic terms, the boundaries of energies and experiences are involved, and probably also the structuring of experience into unconscious and conscious.

By locating the sociological centre of gender in the family, I use the manifest importance of gender for institutionalisation as a criterion. Gender is more important for family creation than for institutionalisation in production or the public sphere. This path of analysis implicates women more deeply in the gender system than men – a proposal that seems to reverse feminist views on this issue. It

commonly want to keep their social position, in broad terms, rather than moving downwards on the social scale through their partner selection.

On the basis of these rules, however, we may still argue that participants in partner selection want to approach each other in terms of gift-giving and sharing, rather than marketing and exchanging. Quite a lot of evidence can be brought to bear at this point, regarding people's subjective views and motives. For the sake of the argument, we may also assume that people actually follow these motives, even if results are more mixed regarding practices. The *result* of these individual approaches, however, may nevertheless be quite different, creating a market-like rather than a gift-like context. In the gift-associated view, each participant wants to meet one unique other person, yet what they meet, at first, especially in arenas like singles' bars or discos, is a series of anonymous others. What results, we know, is a certain element of *competition*. Is this a consequence of individuals' attempts to improve their lot? Once more, I believe the answer is only partially a yes. Unlike the sex ratio is slanted, there is, in fact, a potential partner for everyone, and no need, really, to compete, if individual uniqueness was the only thing sought. A pressure towards competition can arise, however, if some participants try to improve their lot, creating a 'domino effect', comparable to the effect of some people rising among a seated audience, forcing everyone else to rise also, in order to see. So it appears that market-like manouvres may in fact be a minority tendency and yet have a major effect on the whole.

It may be objected that this discussion is somewhat unrealistic, in view of what is known of gender and attractiveness ideals in general and their influence on partner selection choices in particular. It is important, however, for two reasons. The first is empirical. I have mentioned the 'good enough' rule, often in a gift-like setting, that

appears especially in in-depth interviews with participants. Finding 'the best one' may in fact be a limited tendency, and it is usually attributed to *other* participants, not to oneself. Yet it is also described as an 'objective condition' of partner selection in many contexts, especially in the more overt settings described, in a way which seems to warrant the discussion above.

The second reason is theoretical. The theory of the gender market does not presuppose an individual utilitarianist framework. It builds on a very different theory tradition, a critique of economic relations. This leads to a different perspective of what the market is about: an expression of deeper-level societal circumstances, rather than simply a manifestation of individual preferences. It makes more sense on the empirical level than, either, a view that says the market is all, or a view that says it is not there. It is there, but it is not all. Individuals do experience a market-like context in many partner selection settings, especially on the first, most anonymous steps of their approach. A mixture of exchange and gift logic appears in their subjective motives, and as mentioned this tension is by itself a main empirical phenomenon.

Therefore, the perceived market-like character of the interaction influences its participants' motives, sometimes leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy situation. They try to 'get out of the queue', to appear as a unique individual in the eyes of someone else, to make 'an impression' in this sense. 'Gender marketing', then, appears as a paradoxical kind of counter-marketing, a way of overcoming the problems of the transfer. This is all very different from the traditional '*marriage market*' view, which simply presupposes "that each person strives to maximise the social benefits that will accrue from the union" (cf. Carabana, J 1983). The 'counter-character' of gender exchange is not, as we shall see, a minor detail, but rather a main trait of the gender system itself, *as* a counter-positioning vis-à-vis the economic system (chap. 9).

At this point, a caveat should be noted. A large part of the evidence that seems to confirm a gift rather than a market view of partner selection in fact concerns what follows from the selection rather than the selection itself. It highlights the higher steps of the 'staircase' rather than its first or lower steps, showing how people increasingly approach each other in gift terms in the attempt to establish a love relationship. Yet unlike an utilitarianist paradigm that says exchange runs through it all, gender market theory would lead us to expect very different conditions *after* the preceding exchange. In Carol Pateman's term of the 'sexual contract', the relations creating this contract must be distinguished from those following from it.

## Intimacy and anonymity

In a study of intimacy, Philip Wexler (1981) argued against "the asocial utilitarian model" of intimacy, and some of his conclusions are relevant in the present context. He warned against a view of intimacy only as individual, interpersonal attraction, as well as the functionalist analysis of intimacy as "social only in the exercise of constraint and regulation", in favour of a "socially constitutive" conceptualisation of intimacy. Wexler rightly noted the subdued reciprocity elements in intimacy – in contrast to "the dominant tendencies of rationalisation, fragmentation, and powerlessness", its elements of "spontaneity, play, collective solidarity, and personal efficacy". Intimate relations "exhibit the minor, relatively suppressed aspects of social contradictions as their major themes".

These minor, relatively suppressed matters are not so minor, according to the present view. They usually involve gender. A main point of gender relations in general and family relations in particular is to change the scale of the social. Familiarisation means that society becomes smaller, family matters larger, and this is part of a shift of reciprocity terrain as well as a change of the focus of interaction (Holter 1995a). Yet Wexler is right that intimacy does not simply do away with other matters, and his observations on this point is relevant in the gender market context. "The dominant social tendencies are reasserted in the course of the development of intimate relations, creating a dialectic of intimacy."

Wexler argued somewhat bleakly that this dialectic of intimacy consists in a "reversal of social contradictions; the social is personalised, and suppressed aspects of social contradictions become the primary motives, hopes, and themes of intimacy, while pervasive social tendencies are now the reasserted underside, intimacy's underlife." He also described how private life intimisation is accompanied by "social methods through which social structural contradictions are personalised and placed outside social perception". Thus "personalisation does not prevent the experience of social contradiction (recognised as personal ambivalence), but only the identification of its social sources", in other words, it is partly fetishistic. "Within this socially based but consciously unredeemed dynamic, various patterns of intimate relations are possible".

Certainly, the gender market tends to 'hide its own tracks', as people's contact leads into a one-to-one personal setting. Yet this movement is not only a fetishising reversal in Wexler's sense, but also a reality on its own, in need of some further redemption, and I emphasise this aspect, since my original gender market thesis has a certain 'dystopic' quality. Although *not* meeting 'the right one' may be a disappointment, and even if many gender market arenas have qualities that many participants dislike, they also enjoy visiting these arenas, mainly for the kinds of intimacy, spontaneity and friendship reasons mentioned.

Unlike many collectivistic arrangements, a market does not demand that its participants obey its rules in detail. If the aggregate outcome is one of maintaining class as well as gender asymmetry, everyone's project to the contrary is allowed also, to the extent that these may be especially enjoyable.

Therefore there is often a feeling of being 'right' in one's attempt, of following something which is good, positive, which is more than a mirage or a reversal. The *democratic* character of the gender market comes into view: it may be naturalising, but bodies remain more democratically distributed than class privileges. Further, the counter-positioning mentioned creates a dynamic of going beyond self-interest, love becoming more *true* the less it conforms to interest. Statistics and other evidence of class homogamy should be interpreted with this in mind; if the gender market had only been a "class climbers' device", things would have looked different. This is even more evident in the culture and transference fields surrounding the market, where a main theme is an emphasis on love as a matter beyond self-interest and utilitarianism.

Paradoxically, therefore, the gender market not only contributes to a dislike of exchange-related patterns; it also helps create anti-exchange norms in the market itself. I mentioned the tendency in my own 1980 study, where the wish for the "non-

exchange partner" seemed to become all the stronger, the greater the exposure to exchange patterns. Traditional gender notions are also often reinserted at this point, now in a different role, *as* a counterdote to the market. In a study of US students, Williams & Jacoby (1989) found preference among women as well as men for partners without previous sexual experience, in a setting where such previous experiences have become more and more common. Similar traits can be found in Scandinavia.

A symbolic pattern emerges in this field of tension. At first, it may look like a detail. This is the fact that negative exchange-associated traits are often associated with, and attributed to, *women*. The shifts, turbulency, personal insecurity and awkwardness of the gender market setting create, so to speak, one main target, a 'capacity' which is desired and feared or despised at the same time. This is the position of women, especially, *as* subjects and objects of beauty, the 'crown of creation' of the gender market, of which more will be said later.

## The winners take the gift

Different reciprocity forms seldom exist in the form of symmetrical, egalitarian options to be chosen freely. They come to life, also as analytical categories, when we examine their interaction, and include a perspective on power and dominance. We have seen that many phenomena associated with the market are perceived as polluting, dirty, something to be avoided, denied or attributed to others. Yet in the practices of partner selection, some are more enabled to do that than others.

The winners in the market are usually also winners on the reciprocity scale. They have indeed succeeded in making gifts rather than commodities do the 'talking'. So while the winners leave the locality arm in arm ('lucky them'), the rest may look all the more guardedly on each other. The further up on the 'staircase', the greater the possibility to interpret and present what goes on as a gift relation.

Therefore, also, the critique of the gender market is associated with the loner's perspective, and this in turn strengthens the mechanism referred to above, where the inside looks different than the outside, exchanging being what others do, not the individual her- or himself. The winners can point to this inside as a realised fact, and so the loner's perspective is also often one of being alone within oneself, of not really being able to be oneself, or a feeling of emptiness.

Gender market arenas often display supportive organisational traits in order to avoid this outcome. These relate to the elements of play, spontaneity and intimacy mentioned. There is also often a sense of sincerity: 'we did not find anyone, but we enjoyed ourselves all the more'. The winners may be looked at with some suspicion; their enjoyment is perhaps only a case of 'reflection benefits' of 'positive self-evaluation' (Pilkington, C et. al. 1991), a mutual delusion. Also, gift-related interaction now displays more traits in the direction of solidarity, a realism opposed to the illusionism mentioned, especially in working class contexts. So when participants commonly emphasise a positive attitude as a key to participation, quite different traits are in fact involved.

This is still a market context, however, where friendships and other non-market relations become vulnerable. Although the gender market may be interpreted as rational and informative on some levels, there is also much evidence concerning its irrationality. It contributes to stereotyped and misleading assumptions that are often dysfunctional even within the market itself. It is surrounded by gender-related fetishism, and so the traits mentioned above can be interpreted as an 'eye of the storm' effect: right in the middle of the gender market, including the cultural industry catering to its participants' needs, the ideology of love and the exaggeration of anything gendered that surrounds the market itself, there is a certain realism, some quiet moments, and a kind of 'street wisdom'.

Bodies are main targets of the market fetishism, and body disfiguration is one main outcome. A series of half-true or false beliefs about body ideals is created, not concerning the body as such, but the body *as* carrier of gendered attractiveness. A common finding is that men and women both tend to assume that the members of the other sex emphasise their own gender-related body traits more than they actually do – with a resulting pressure towards chest-building among men, increased breast size among women, and similar, a "societal preoccupation with breast/chest size" and a dissatisfaction among women especially with one's own body. (cf. Thompson & Tantleff 1992). In a Norwegian study presented later, I found evidence that social factors are more important for the evaluation of one's partner's appearance than commonly recognised, especially for women's evaluation of men. 'He looks better if he helps out at home' would be a brief summary of this tendency (Holter 1990c:104-5). Also, the dysfunctionality of many gender market traits for later relationship building was confirmed in this study, including an emphasis of external appearance that led to increased frequency of jealousy and conflict later; an 'easy come, easy go' tendency.

## Non-monetary exchange

If 'the commodity' is relevant in terms of contemporary gender, what is meant by this category? Some wider theoretical issues are discussed in this section and the next one, before focusing on gender as 'real abstraction'.

Theories of *non-monetary* commodities are obviously of relevance in the present context, since the normal gender dyad is not created through buying and selling. Whatever is involved of exchange should conform to, or at least not outright disturb, a larger normative sense of the fully voluntary and free gift.

Non-monetary exchange forms remains an underdeveloped area of research and theory in social science. It is underdeveloped in much the same sense that women's contribution to the economy is an underdeveloped field, and, I shall argue, for related reasons. This has helped sustain the common idea that commodity exchange is simply synonymous with monetary exchange. Two main avenues exist here. When money is not present, one should either overlook that fact, as is done in much sociological theorising along utilitarianist or market-rationalist lines, for example in the partner selection area – *or* quite other analytical frameworks should be used, like that of gift reciprocity. Yet the first approach tendentially 'perverts' love and gender into signs of money, dismissing more serious sociological attempts (like Simmel 1982) of uncovering the *specific* connection between monetarism, abstractism and anonymity,



while the second, as shall be shown, easily twists these 'other' frameworks themselves, so that, for example, gifts no longer become a question of giving, but of exchanging, as a kind of handicapped commodities.

A notion of gender as a commodity abstraction brings Marxist theory into view. Today, a 'divorce' has commonly been agreed-upon in this area, in terms of feminist and gender theory. Marx-associated notions like gender as value form or capital formation is not exactly hot-spots of research. Some issues are outlined here, as an introduction to this debate.

The kind of Marxism usually approached by feminists in the 1970s was in many ways an unlikely one, yet it was by far the most well-known – not for feminist reasons, in any sense, rather the contrary. It was a *class-focused* Marxism rather than a *commodity-focused* one. I emphasise that I do not believe good qualitative class studies, or quantitative analyses which have the qualitative aspect in mind, run counter to feminist analyses, or that class is of secondary importance. The problem, rather, lies in approaching Marx's theory itself in class terms, which was the predominant habit of Marx-reading radicals of the 1970s, one that affirmed their rather 'masculinistic' orientation by placing their relations to *other men* as the main topic of discussion (Holter 1990i). Yet *Capital* is not about class. It is about commodities, and the 'hegemony' of commodities, with class distinctions as part of this hegemony. This wider sociological angle is even clearer in the draft to that work, *Grundrisse*. Marx's statement to the effect that class, without commodity analysis, becomes a phrase, is relevant here. In order to understand the gender system *sui generis*, 'class' will not suffice; we are better off starting with the 'detail', the commodity relationship, rather than the larger notions of class.

There are three main reasons why this approach is relevant in a gender context. Firstly, unlike many other economists, Marx did attempt to create a theory of non-monetary exchange forms, which was much more central to his capitalism and class theory than generally recognised. Secondly, his view was 'critical' in the basic sociological sense of attempting to recognise human subjectivity where it is not, seemingly, at hand, i.e. an attempt to move from the exchange surface of commodity relations, towards the activity and control relations beneath it. Thirdly, his theory, especially its 'value form' kernel (cf. Appendix 1), allows interpretations of social identity formation which are pertinent also in a gender system context. If there is a staging behind the gender performance, connected to gender as 'real abstraction', commodity analysis shows some of the character of this background process.

The question of 'rescuing Marx from the Marxists' is relevant in this setting, yet only a few points can be mentioned here. It involves a distinction between ideological and sociological parts of his theory, or an uncovering of the parts that are often called 'economy-critical' as against his evolutionist and essentialist materialism. Briefly put, the latter can be had from all kinds of sources, while the former is what made Marx a great thinker. However, a further movement is also involved, one of going beyond a superficial version of his theory that makes it into a thesis of absolute conflict between "exchange value" *versus* "use value" – a common misconception also among feminists. Certainly, Marx's value form analysis alone is only a very partial guide to wider reciprocity form issues, yet it is also important since the part that it does address is of main importance in our society.

In some of his late writings, especially "*Notes on Adolph Wagner*" (1879-80), Marx commented on his own methodology of commodity analysis, comments that are relevant in the 'gender as commodity' context of discussion. He writes:

"Nowhere do I speak of the 'common social substance of exchange-value'. (...) Herr Wagner forgets that neither 'value' nor 'exchange value' are my subjects, but *the commodity*" (Marx 1975b:183). By this noun, he meant a specific form of *social interaction*:

"On no account do men begin by 'standing in a theoretical relation to the external world'. They begin (..) by *relating themselves actively*" (op.cit.190). "My analytic method, which does not start out from *man*, but from the economically-given social period, has nothing in common with the academic German method of connecting concepts." (op.cit 201).

His further statement is important a context where gender is viewed as 'use value':

"My analysis of the commodity does not stop at the dual mode [of exchange value *versus* use value] in which the commodity is presented, [but] presses forward, showing that in the dual character [*Doppelsein*] of the commodity there is presented the twofold *character of labour* (..) [and proceeding to] the development of the *value-form of the commodity*, in the last instance, its money-form, hence [an analysis] of *money*, [where] the *value* of the commodity is presented as the *use-value* of another, i.e. in the natural form of another commodity" (op.cit. 200).

Instead of abstract concepts, Marx clearly emphasises the importance of specific forms of interaction, or in my terms, of analysing specific transfer forms within a reciprocity context where several such forms may be present at the same time. "The" value form, in Marx' view, itself contains highly *different* subforms or types of exchange, and even if he often eagerly "presses on" towards money, as in the quote above, in order to explain capital, it remains clear that the monetary value form is only one of these forms. In a historical typology, Marx outlined the evolution of the monetary value form on the basis of three main non-monetary forms – called the 'elementary' form, the 'extended' form, and the 'total' or 'common' form. Although this may not have been stated by Marx, it follows from his analysis that these subforms are also *co-existing* patterns in any given commodity exchange context, creating a *shifting hierarchy* of value forms. This is important for understanding the multidimensional character of gender, as shall be shown.

## Qualitative value analysis

Since many sociologists regard value theory as a dubious approach, some objections are addressed in greater detail in this section. After all, this whole territory of 'commodities' and 'value' may seem wholly foreign to the analysis of gender, or at least gender as we would like it, as ideal, untainted by sex for money or the like.

The 'labour theory of value' is most familiar, at least for sociologists, in an economic context usually characterised by a debate on the relationship between labour time-derived values and empirically observed prices. What is not so commonly recognised

is that Marx's value theory brings us to a crossroad, where we may proceed in two main directions, one quantitative, the other qualitative. The first quantitative path has been predominant in the economic debate, leading to quantitative economic analysis. The other path, however, leads into quite different areas, like social psychology, anthropology, and theory of reciprocity. Instead of price and value magnitudes, the topics that appear here are questions of social identity, categories of self and others, of chaos and order; how people conceive of themselves and the world, and how such phenomena are related to the background qualities of their social interaction.

Although both of these perspectives may be important, I believe the qualitative direction is the central one for sociology, especially for understanding conglomeratic relations like those associated with gender, where different reciprocities come into view. Marx often seems to have recognised the importance of this qualitative analysis also, or at least more so than many later Marxists.

This qualitative approach is at once both a fairly ordinary and an almost unknown path. It is ordinary in the sense that the sociological setting of economic arrangements is a well-known topic of theory and debate. Still, it is my experience that very few sociologists know what 'value form analysis' might mean as a sociological approach. One reason is that an institutional and sociological angle is often only implied in Marx's rather condensed analysis. At the same time, this is a part of his theory that is commonly recognised as hard to grasp, both due to its connection of ontology (how things are) to epistemology (how we perceive them), and due to its compact character. Yet there can be little doubt that it plays a central role in his theory as a whole (see, e.g. Postone, M 1993).

Value analysis is sometimes interpreted as a 'spiritistic' Marxism, one that leaves reality behind in order to discuss value questions that can never be fully empirically determined anyway. This is probably true, as long as we consider value *as such*, as something that either is there, expressed in prices or other 'real' measures, or is not there. Yet it is not at all true whenever we consider value as *one form of interdependency*, i.e. as an *expression* of one form of reciprocity.

In this qualitative perspective, the main matter is not the degree of truth to 'value' as applied to the current economy – or to the gender system. Value may be there as part of reality, as illusion, or as Marx argued, as some of both, a 'practically realised illusion'. We may decide that the modern preoccupation with value, ontologically speaking, belongs alongside European feudalism's preoccupation with heaven and hell, and that the value/price debate is a new version of the question of how many angels can fit on the head of a pin. Yet the main point, in the sociological approach, is that value may be as significant for *understanding* major traits of societies of our own age, including the modern gender system, as the religious beliefs are for understanding feudalism.

This argument may be taken as a Weberian reinterpretation of Marx, a designation of value only as pure type; Marx, after all, put heavy emphasis both on the quantitative side of value and on its real existence, and a further argument may be offered that any qualitative value analysis is in fact linked both to quantities and some minimal agreement on value's factual existence. Yet I believe we do not have to move into questions of value as natural fact in order to recognise its importance as social fact, in

the manner of Durkheim; it *appears* as a factual necessity associated with 'nature', to the extent that it also, whatever its deeper truths, regulate interaction and creates a main 'preoccupation of society'. There is good basis in Marx' theory for the thesis that any sociality constructs its own 'nature' – and, further, that commodity-influenced sociality is somewhat unique in creating this 'nature' into its form or expression of *social* necessity.

As we saw, Marx emphasised that value as such was not his approach, but rather the real existence and development of different contexts of commodity exchange or forms of exchangeability. Yet this 'as such' approach is exactly the one which has been used, or used most frequently, in the feminist *pro-et-contra* debate on Marxism, including the critique of my own use of Marxist theory elements in the gender market theory. Gender is not value *as such*. Quite true: this value as such exists nowhere. It is precisely by deconstructing this straw man version that some of Marx's insights can be used fruitfully in a reciprocity forms investigation.

We may make value forms more intelligible in that perspective by calling them exchange forms, pricing forms, valorisation forms or even 'appraisal forms', for all these notions are involved. 'Value' in a social forms context is a cluster of relations, types of behaviour, institutions and identity formations, existing in forms that may be quite different and even opposed.

Further, adhering to a Weberian interpretation of economy as activity, these forms are not to be interpreted as a kind of background apparatus moving on its own; we do not have to retain the kind of Hegelian master plan ideas that sometimes surface in Marx's writings. Instead, issues of power reappear; a zone of exchangeability is created and maintained through a system of control, allowing some kinds of exchanges, barring others.

The main interest of this kind of perspective, in the present context, concerns social identity, and Marx's basic idea that social identity is 'exchangeability identity', linked to the ways in which each person's activity is socially validated through exchange. By itself, this may perhaps be dismissed as another form of materialism, though more subtle than what often passes under that name – yet connected to the idea that the material or sensual aspect of the one commodity establishes the social identity of the other, it becomes interesting in a gender context. This is the terrain of gender market theory, not as a separate matter of partner selection, but for understanding how gender identity is established in general, why sex attributes appear as if they were able to dictate social relations all on their own.

What we see, then, starting out from the crossroad of value theory, is that value as a more or less *essentialist form of measurement* differs from value as a concept highlighting different *qualities of social interaction*, and that the latter is an important subject on its own, especially from a reciprocity analysis point of view. In this connection, the treatment of value form analysis within Marxism itself is of some interest. There is a specific patriarchal edge to the 'forgetfulness' among Marxists regarding Marx's value form approach, and the way this part of his theory was handed over to the economists as if simply a question of magnitudes. Everyone with the barest acquaintance with Marx' theory knows that 'value' is a relational concept, one that requires not just a commodity, but commodity *relations*. Yet the category of

value itself has not usually been treated in this relativistic or relational manner, but rather as absolute, unconditional.

In fact, the value and commodity category appears in the archetypal *woman's role* in much Marxist theorising, even a virginal role – one that is constantly proposed to, proclaimed, declared, creating a basic 'strategic appeal' in Marxist *Herrschaft*, yet not really addressed or worked with on its own terms: quite the contrary, such attempts have usually been dismissed as 'deviations' from the true path. In my experience, there are curious and perhaps not so incidental parallels between this perception of *commodity questioning* as threatening inside Marxism and the perceived threat of some forms of *gender questioning* within feminism.

## Gender as a commodity category

The gender market theory has a twofold focus. The first and main one is 'qualitative', relating to the social identification aspects introduced above, and the question of why it is that people become perceived *as* gendered people. The second is 'distributional'. It concerns the distribution of people to the activity units of the domestic sphere, and especially the distribution of 'reproducers' to the main non-wage part of the 'sphere of reproduction'. These terms, denoting human resource-oriented work, are further discussed later, as is the relationship between the sphere of production and the sphere of reproduction.<sup>4</sup> The gender market is seen as an expression of background traits, including this broad sphere relationship, meaning, in brief terms, that the positions of 'producer' and 'reproducer' are here realised, validated and recreated *as* gendered positions.

The qualitative aspect concerns social identity and the creation of gendered attractiveness. The topic, then, is how a commodified set of relationships are given a paradoxical reality in modern partner selection practices, and how these relationships constrain the gift and redistribution aspects of the resulting gender dyads.

As argued, the marketing of gender may be interpreted as an unintended consequence of the interaction between individuals who mostly are occupied with gift-like ideals and subjective motives. Yet this alone will not suffice for explaining the character of the market. Societal background relationships, including the way in which the sphere of reproduction is dominated by the sphere of production, must be taken into account; these are not outside matters, but constituents of gender relations themselves. This will shortly be described further. For now, it should be noted that even as gender market participants 'flee' the rules of the market, attempting to establish couple relationships in a gift-like terrain, they do so *through* mechanisms that are not eligible on the individual level, but lodged in gender itself, independently of its gift- or commodity-like character. The net result, then, is that right in the middle of participants' motivations focused on individual love, some very non-individual rules of class and gender are upheld.

New unions are thereby based on principles that are not easily revoked, later, in the relationship itself, creating conflicts and tensions that contribute to current family problems. In this perspective, family conflicts are not simply matters of asymmetry but also related to market patterns, including perpetual ambivalence and

substitutability of the other. Further, it is hypothesised that unions tend to break up for such market-related reasons, besides what happens on, either, a male dominance level, or a more personal level. This break-up process in turn contributes to a broadening of the sphere of the 'institutionally realised' gender market (the 'second-hand market' (*bruktmarkedet*) in the Norwegian expression).

What is the commodity of the gender market? Like the wage labour market, the gender market involves future activities, which are presented in this context as capabilities, activity potentials or, in traditional terms, 'labour powers', if we extend this term so as to include activities of love, intimacy, relationship maintenance, care and sexuality, as well as 'labour' in the somewhat more conventional meaning of 'domestic work'.

The broad and partly diffuse character of the capabilities involved is a common trait of non-monetary transfers, especially those concerning personal services. In many kinds of reciprocity relationships it is not deemed necessary to stipulate benefits and burdens in a formal manner, and it may be difficult to do so. What is involved is a set of obligations, expectations of future activities, and that people in practice are able to distinguish between activities that are congruent with these obligations and those that are not. It is certainly true that *disagreements* may appear, like quarrels over standards in the household, yet these are not just all and any disagreements, but rest on this wider congruency basis.

The character of the gender market commodity may, however, point to concepts other than the traditional one of 'labour power'; Anna Jonasdottir's 'love power' has been mentioned. Although I believe gender market analysis may be used in order to contextualise that concept, Jonasdottir uses it of women only, and so it seems a partial definition of what is offered in the exchange. Two main traits emerge; the exchange stipulates a wide set of future activity, and this activity is *gendered* and expressed not as attraction as such, or love power as such, but *as* gendered attractiveness. We may say that the market opposes men's 'provider power' to women's love power, yet in order to understand the market itself, *sui generis*, I still find the category 'gender market' more apt. Gendered attractiveness is the *manifestation* of such background differences, and the task of the theory is not only to highlight this background, but also, as emphasised earlier, to understand why it is expressed in this form.

Although the capacities and expectations are wide, the total person is not involved, neither here nor in the wage labour market; what is involved is the person *as* representative of gendered attractiveness. This is surely a diffuse and broad category, but it does not include all and any activity, which again is something gender system participants are aware of. As a partner in a relationship, I may demand that my partner does not have intimate relationships with others, yet if I demand that he or she does not have friends, or that I should be the one who decides whether the other is employed or not, my demands run counter to current relationship standards, and I am probably headed for conflict. We may be short-term or life-term partners, yet our mutual ownership, the sphere in which we feel that we have the right to expect certain behaviours and activities from each other, consists in our partnership capacities, not in our friendship capacities or wage work powers. The fact that this sphere of expectations has varied historically and is still different for men and women, does not mean that it is non-existing.

Instead of defining the gender market as a love power market represented by women only, we might go to quite the opposite position, and define it as a 'partnership market'. Yet then we would still exclude a main part of the reality *sui generis* of gender market interaction, not now the 'balanced' or neutral part, but the gender difference part, as is further discussed below. We are approaching the fact that the gender market is a *two-tiered* process, and that 'gender' has different meanings on each level. Yet gender itself remains a key category of the obligations and future activities involved in the exchange.

On this background we may say that the gender commodity of the market consists in specific, even if wide, mutual rights to the other person *as* man or woman. The non-formalised and non-monetary character of the exchange means that the economic aspect, money and prices, is not clearly split off from the concrete phenomena involved. Rather, it exists as an aspect of phenomena that simultaneously appear in other contexts or capacities, i.e. as an 'exchange value aspect' of 'use values'. In the gender market, it appears as the gendered attractiveness of a person, i.e. a person's femininity or masculinity as distinct not just from other traits of the person, but mainly from the same traits evaluated in other ways. Femininity and masculinity emerge more as a *distinct evaluation framework for all kinds of personal traits* than as a specific set of traits. Gender thereby sheds some of its use value character; here, in the inner public space created within the gender system itself, it is a form of *valorisation* of whatever is presented by the persons participating. "Within the value relationship and the expression of value in it, the abstractly general does not count as a trait of the concrete, sensually real; instead, the sensually concrete counts only as an expression or specific form of realisation of the abstractly general." (Marx 1975:70, my trans.)

The gender market theory does not entail that other communicational and symbolic aspects of gender thereby disappear, rather it suggests that these are reorganised, given a new framework of meaning. Neither does it presuppose a specific 'price formation' or 'attractiveness mechanism' theory, except for some minimum ground rules – the *existence* of an intersubjective attractiveness scale, especially in men's evaluation of women; the *importance* of attractiveness for further contact, and a perceived *balance* of attractiveness as the typical 'entry condition' to a relationship.

Attraction, then, is 'gendered', as is the contact based on it. What does this mean? Here a set of phenomena appears that seemingly contradicts the conclusion that could be drawn from the discussion above, namely that gender is a valorisation framework which is indifferent to the use values within the framework.

That does not seem to be true: certain use values or personal traits are much more important than others. Body height is an example. Even if height by itself may not mean too much, the right *combination* of heights, with the man 'suitably higher' than the woman, is important. What appears, now, instead of a 'chaotic' assemblage of personal traits, is a gendered organisation of such traits, a *specific exchange-related organisation of use value*, in which 'sex difference' takes pride of place. Use values gain importance in this organisation if they can be taken as expressions of the gender opposition, or as they serve to enhance or *polarise* this opposition. The height difference is only a small part of a wide 'sensual fabric' of body presentations, postures, the facial trait enhancements, presentations of self, clothing and much else.

The exchange relation contains two different 'mechanisms'. On the one hand, the two commodities brought into the relation are posited as *equal*. On the other hand, the reason for the exchange in the first place is, precisely, the fact that they are dissimilar, the rule of *quid pro quo*, something for something else.

The gender market tendentially enhances gender in the sense of 'difference', and difference in the sense of an organised 'polarity', while at the same time presenting this difference as purely qualitative, within a larger framework of quantitative equality. The feminine should be as good as the masculine; the two are opposed on a symmetrical level, and as far as the gender market is concerned, asymmetrical difference or *stratification* is not 'there', or in practice, it *should* not be there. This, we may note, is quite dissimilar and even the opposite of how differences between men and women appear in society at large, and especially in wage work and monetary relations, where we instead meet them mostly as quantitative differences, like the wage gap, as if gender was only incidentally involved. There is a dual distortion, quality one way, quantity the other, both artificially isolated, and so the analytical task is to reconnect them.

## The two levels of the gender market exchange

It is fairly obvious that the degree of asymmetry in gender relations is influenced by the position of men and women in society at large. In a pure 'provider' context, with women as domestic workers and men as wage workers, we would expect the asymmetry to be large and overt, whereas in a more egalitarian context we would expect it to be smaller. Further, we might expect that it would fully disappear with an egalitarian distribution of wage work – although we shall soon find reasons for caution at this point.

For the moment, our point of departure is studies showing that the gender asymmetry has not disappeared from partner selection, even if the gap has become somewhat smaller over the last decades. This assessment is supported also by a wide range of cultural phenomena, including the typical content of women's *versus* men's magazines. The gender 'curriculum' remains segregated – and asymmetrical.

Two models of partner selection contexts clarify this situation. The first is a 'breadwinner model' in which all men are wage workers, while women are domestic workers. The future goods and services that would be involved in the exchange (with exchange symbolised by the equal sign) in this context may be summarised as:

A part of the man's wage = the woman's domestic labour capacity.<sup>5</sup>

In the second model, women and men are both domestic and wage workers on equal terms. The exchange in this context would be symmetrical:

The man's wage and domestic labour capacity = the woman's similar capacity

We may translate the latter with "partnership for partnership", since this fully egalitarian context also tends to dissolve the economic factors involved. It is no longer so easy to define what is exchanged for what. In practice, reproduction and



production-related capacities are represented by both partners in a dyadic relationship; dyads are often entrepreneurial and inventive in their members' search for relative uniqueness and individuality, even if the gender segregation remains.

Now the key point: the gender market presupposes a societal context where *both* of these principles, equality and asymmetry, carry some weight. The market requires women as well as men as self-determined subjects, including a minimum level of economic subject status of women as well as men.

If only the first breadwinner model prevailed, women would in principle be owned by men, or in practice dependent on men for their livelihood. On the other hand, the full symmetry of the second model has not yet been realised in any society. Rather, what we see, and the context in which the gender market has appeared in the 20th. century, is a situation that can be theorised as a combination of the two models, or as a structure existing in the intermediate zone between them.

On this background, the gender market theory posits the exchange element in partner selection as *a process on two levels*, which somewhat pointedly are referred to as a level of '*exchange between men and women*' that hides a deeper level of '*exchange of women between men*'.<sup>6</sup>

The relations and meanings of gender involved at each level are quite different from each other, to the extent that the gender market proper only allows the second level a public expression as recast or filtered into the first level form of dyadic symmetry. It is more clearly expressed in the halfway illegal institutions that surround the normal gender market in its back yard of prostitution and pornography. Yet these contain their own forms of distortion of the gender relationship and are *not* directly expressive of the normal relationship, since they exist within the monetary form, rather than the gendered form of exchange. The latter must be understood so to speak on its own premises, as a 'social hieroglyph' on its own.

In gender studies as elsewhere, the *dyadic* character of the gender relationship has become something of a convention. So even if 'gender studies' in fact primarily means women's studies, and even if, likewise, almost anything else 'gendered' in our society in practice turns out to mean women mostly, gender *should* mean men and women, on equal terms. I believe formal logic plus some 'egalitarian good will' here obscure the analysis.<sup>7</sup>

Logically there are undoubtedly two genders, and men and women are gendered to the same extent. Yet 'gender' here is supposed to refer to a social category, not a logical one, or a biological one, like sex. And it is a *social* fact, in the gender market as elsewhere, that gender does not refer to men and women in the same way, *and* not to the same degree. This is gender's actual content.

This observation is not to be classified as an attempt to withdraw men from an analysis of patriarchy; as I said, we really have no reason to assume that men are less implicated than women on that account, rather the contrary. The present argument simply concerns the empirical fact that gender tends to involve women more than men, whatever egalitarian-minded researchers might wish.

What appears at the deeper level of the gender market is neither a dyadic nor a symmetrical relationship. What appears, instead, is a relationship where the woman, alone, represents gender, while the man, in principle, is *absent* as a person, and *present*, instead, through his property or sphere of control. Once more, this is a key category, even if diffuse at first. Its significance can be clarified: instead of a closed definition of the gender system, where the polarities of masculine and feminine oppose and confirm each other in a circle, what is proposed is an open definition, which is basically *triadic* rather than dyadic in character.

In formal terms, this triadic relationship may be described as:

M  
= F  
N

The feminine position F is *posited as equal to* both the masculine position M and to the man's sphere of control. As an approximation, I call it 'neutral property', N.

This relates to the two-tiered character of the gender market exchange relation, where the first level may be described as:

Masculinity = femininity, or

M = F.

The = sign means "exchangeable with", "equally attractive", "of equal value". The meaning of gender which is operative on this level I call *dyadic gender*. This corresponds to the egalitarian model outlined above.

While the first level is symmetrical, the second level is not. At that point, the woman or femininity does not equal the man or masculinity. The two are not present in the same way in the relationship – rather, the one is *present*, with her body and capacities, while the other is not, and is instead *represented* by what he owns or controls. The relation, therefore, is one where a certain category of 'neutrality' is posited as equal to femininity:

Neutrality = femininity, or

N = F.

This corresponds to the model of male wage work and female domestic work presented above. The meaning of gender which is operative here is the one I call *gender-as-woman*. We shall soon see that it is a wholly different affair from the symmetrical gender of the first level. The factual asymmetry in most gendered phenomena in our society indicates the continued relevance of analyses of this level.

It should also be noted that these two levels do not presuppose an exchange context. Unless other circumstances are present that change the overall relationship, the two levels can be found *also* in gift giving and sharing settings, as is discussed later (chap. 5). In simple terms, they are a bit more easily perceived in the exchange context than

elsewhere. This is the case for example in dating or in other contexts where the man pays the expenses: he is partly there in person, partly through his money – while she is there in person on both accounts, on both levels.

The two levels are presented together in the figure below.

### **The real abstraction of the gender dyad**

This model summarises the abstract, economic aspects of the relationship. There is a symmetrical level, where both participate as subjects, present in person, and an asymmetrical background level, where the man's neutral property or sphere of control corresponds to a different kind of personal presence on her side. In the notation used here and later, personal resources are represented by circles, impersonal resources by squares ('personal' meaning represented by the bodily presence of the subject). The white figures represent the dyadic level, while the black figures represent the gender-as-woman level.

Today it is not hard to recognise the relevance of this model when one looks at the traditional family and breadwinner setting a couple of generations ago. As long as women's livelihood consists of men's money, women depend on men, and beneath the formal level, they belong to men's sphere of property. Yet it is often overlooked that this vertical relation does *not* simply disappear because women own their own money. It is certainly changed, and the relation does become more horizontal, but the vertical aspect does not simply vanish. The asymmetrical level of gender relations does not disappear even though women's sources of livelihood are no longer dependent on men's earnings. There may be several reasons for this; one of them, and perhaps the main one, is the *sphere asymmetry* that exists between production and reproduction

In a system where both men and women earn their own money, yet with men primarily connected to the sphere of production, women to the sphere of reproduction, women are no longer individually dependent on men's wage. However their reproduction sphere wage work is still *collectively dependent* on production sphere work. Their dependency is now 'softened', or *mediated* mainly through taxes and the state. Nevertheless, women's livelihood is still seemingly 'paid for' by men's work, by production profits. This *appearance* – for I shall hold that it is in fact illusory – is a *truth* in market terms, in state budget terms, and in the wider political and cultural system. It is a very selective, partial truth, yet one that dominates on surface of the economy. What can be expected, from this background societal connection, is much in line with the evidence reviewed so far: a less overt, more subdued asymmetry compared to what would exist in a 'pure' breadwinner system, yet one that is still around in more subtle ways than before.

This background sphere relationship is of main importance for understanding the relevance of the models of gender interaction in the present chapter and the next one. According to the present view, a fully symmetric gender system, one with the dyadic level only, would *dissolve* the organisation of gender as we know it today. The asymmetry is not 'incidental'; it is a key issue *also* for understanding what goes on on the symmetrical or dyadic level.<sup>8</sup>

In another context I have discussed gender as a set of frames on this background, using 'frame' in Erving Goffman's (1975) meaning of that term (Holter 1984f). This is a 'depth structuring' or background framework that creates the taken-for-granted aspects of interaction and the *a priori* meanings associated with it. Further, I attempted to connect this 'framing' process to value form analysis. Thereby, four major gender frames appeared:

- (1) individual gender – gender as an individual determination;
- (2) generic gender – gender as a general determination;
- (3) dyadic gender – gender as a dyadic determination;
- (4) gender as woman – gender as a determination of women or the feminine only.

One main reason why 'gender' is hard to pinpoint or describe in unconditional terms relates to this typology: in practice, its meaning continuously *shifts* between at least these four frames of meaning. It is 'there' and 'not there', or it was there *then*, whereas *now* it has slipped into another framework of meaning, so categorising it is a bit like finding the piece of soap in the bath tub. The wider cultural and societal context puts shifting emphasis on different gender frames.

In the gender market transaction, for example, there is a transition from gender as a generic frame, brought out by the extended exchange relation at the first steps of the 'staircase' described earlier, a change towards gender as an individual trait, with gender disappearing into the realm of the 'purely personal'. As I said, there is a turnaround from 'the best one' to 'the right one'; what was generic is turned on its head and becomes the key to the other's uniqueness.

The four frames can – somewhat tentatively – be placed in a stratification and differentiation context, as conceptualised in the following model.

#### **Four 'frames' of gender**

This model is meaningful in some respects, not in others. The generic and individual meanings of gender certainly belong together logically and also often practically, and they may often be interpreted as polarities, mutually emphasising each other. In some contexts, this is a formal opposition, while the dyadic gender and gender-as-woman frames have much more sociological substance.

Nevertheless, as a rule, wherever the gender-as-woman frame comes to the foreground, gender-as-generic tend to be emphasised also, while on the other hand, dyadic gender and gender as individual also often go together.

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<sup>1</sup> It may be argued that the image of a balancing act is misleading. Almost all gender theorising known to me instead has a different logical form. It does not say: factors A and B create factor C (gender). Instead it says: Factor A (biology, sex) *modified* by B (society) creates gender. It is true that most debate and research today concerns this modification. Yet it remains precisely that: a modification field. A true balance act presupposes some *independent* factor B that does more than 'modify' what is there already, and I find that such arguments are rare. *If* gender is a social division in the same sense as

social class (although in another form), this situation becomes highly significant, as is discussed later (chap. 8).

<sup>2</sup> As is discussed in chapter 8, this view also represents a reversal, so to speak true to the spirit of our time, of the traditional notion that 'gender' is the product of 'family'.

<sup>3</sup> This seems to have been Freud's own view also, although he mainly conceived of this problem in terms of not being able to explain femininity. Sometimes he seems to go further: "From the point of view of psychoanalysis the exclusive sexual interest felt by [heterosexual] men for women is also a problem that needs elucidation and not a self-evident fact based upon an attraction that is ultimately of chemical nature." (Freud 1979:57). I do not know how far he recognised the logical problem: when one side of a polarity is not understood, the polarity or difference itself is not understood, and by implication not really the other side either. Although he usually mentioned masculinity and femininity side by side, as a polarity, his writing gives the impression of one broad masculine road plus an aberrant feminine path. On the basic energy level, he put masculinity equal to activity, femininity to passivity; this was the "essential" (op.cit. 141) meaning of gender. Therefore women's sexuality was described as "masculine activity" at least as far as it was centred on the clitoris (op.cit. 339). Why "activity" should need the qualifier "masculine" illustrates the problem at hand. At the stage of pregenital organisation "there is as yet no question of male and female"; it is only by the onset of puberty "that the sexual polarity coincides with male and female" (op.cit. 312). From a patriarchy analysis point of view, it is interesting that he basically made cross-sex polarity into a transformed form of earlier male-male antagonism through castration fear and the Oedipus complex. Yet it may be argued that this antagonism presupposes the gender that was to be explained, a son who already sees himself and his father as masculine competitors.

<sup>4</sup> The notion of reproductive work seems to have developed in parallel in many feminist-oriented research circles at the end of the 1970s (the first reference I find in *Sociofile* is from 1979). For an early discussion confer Mary O'Brien 1981:14pp., similar in Holter 1982a.

<sup>5</sup> "Domestic labour capacity" is used as shorthand for capacities for love, care, friendship, sexual and other intimacy, relations work, housework, and all other activities that are normal parts of the relationship.

<sup>6</sup> Exchange is a phase of commodity relationships, use of property another. Here, the two can be defined as 'men's and women's mutual property in each other' *versus* 'men's property in women'.

<sup>7</sup> Gender studies are full of statements that there are in fact two genders, that the one implicates the other, and so on. In men's studies this is sometimes turned around: "Sociologically nothing can be written on men and masculinities without at the same time analysing women and femininities" (Armbruster, C 1993: 126, my trans). Yet if we want balance here, indeed if this is a main goal of the whole effort, there comes a point where we must recognise that things are not balanced whenever gender is around, and instead of asserting that the imbalance is wrong, we must ask why it is there.

<sup>8</sup> This argumentation anticipates matters presented in subsequent chapters. Without the asymmetry, gendered organisation would no longer be *superimposed*, to use Foucault's term, on people's private lives and organisation of intimacy; the sex-related organisation which would appear would probably also be very different from today (chap. 8). The sphere relationship is further discussed especially in chapter 9; in chapter 13 I discuss why a truth at the market level ('production pays') is nevertheless an untruth when we consider society as a whole. See also Holter 1982a.

## Chapter 4 In the mirror of the other

"The product of private labour only has a social form as far as it has a value form and thus the form of exchangeability with other labour products." "In this [equivalent] position, it is a thing in which we see nothing but value, or whose palpable bodily

form represents value." "The fetishism is most marked in the equivalent position (..) its value-being is a relationship which is alien to the object itself." (Marx, K 1975:87 my trans.; 1970:58; 1975:93).

"Irigaray (..) maintains that the feminine is necessarily redoubled, that it exists first as a signifier within masculinistic economy, but then it 'exists' outside that economy (where nothing may exist) as precisely what that economy must repudiate (..) [She] claims that the feminine is always elsewhere (..) Spivak argues that the feminine is produced and erased at the same time (..) Cornell insists that the feminine has no place in reality." (Butler, J 1994:18).

## Introduction

This chapter continues the discussion of gender, exchange and identity, focusing on 'sex objectification', a theme which in feminist literature has often been connected to notions of absolute alienation (e.g. "women are controlled by lashing us to our bodies"<sup>1</sup>). Using Catharine MacKinnon's well-known analysis as example, I discuss why gender-related reification differs from objectification, how it may be seen as a broader, but also less extreme process, and how a study of reification can be oriented towards analysis of meaning and signification. Rather than negating subjectivity altogether, reification enhances some forms of subject identity and organisation, dissolving or subduing others, and what is reified in one context may be gift-like in another. This leads to a reexamination of the central category of the gender market theory, 'the beauty object'.

First, some problems of approaching gender as a form of 'evaluative code' are discussed, and a view of gender as a shifting form of value is presented. Two main 'gender epistemologies' are outlined, corresponding to the relative and the equivalent position of the gender value form, associated with men and women respectively.

At the end of the chapter, I discuss some common critiques of commodity-related analyses of gender in general and of the gender market theory in particular.

## Gender as evaluative code

Femininity in the gender market context implies a certain form of passivity; masculinity a certain form of initiative or activity. Even in egalitarian settings, this remains a background polarity, more noticeable on the level of actions than on the level of words, a pattern that is surprisingly 'gender-conservative' and resistant to change.

This becomes all the more curious when we recognise that the gender market pattern is the household and family sphere pattern – turned on its head. *There*, instead, it is femininity that is associated with activity, masculinity with relative passivity. She *does*, he *is*, at least in terms of housework.<sup>2</sup>

This turnaround illustrates one of the classic twists of the market, considered as an information device: it tends to give an upside-down representation of the activity

organisation connected to it.<sup>3</sup> By implication, it also shows that the market analysis of gender is not altogether irrelevant.

By examining gender as a 'code', we depart from the common approach that focuses on what follows from gender. Instead our interest is what creates gender, what the code means and why it is there. We want to identify the societal patterns that the code points to. A twofold approach is suggested in this chapter, one of attempting to understand the code itself, while also attempting to identify probable societal background patterns. The decipherment is a process of going back and forth between these: do they fit, as we would expect them to fit, or do they not. The broad hypothesis is that gender is what appears, given a specific societal context, including a specific form of expression.

By focusing on how a certain adult-life pattern of interaction like the gender market makes a deeper-level societal constitution of gender evident, I am not implying that socialisation is irrelevant. Certainly 'all' gender is not created in any current context of interaction, there and then. What happens there and then, instead, is that gender is socially validated, made into something to be recognised, practically real. So current circumstances influence what is seen as relevant socialisation experience and what is not. As psychodynamic theory tells us, socialisation experiences are seldom wholly lost or irrelevant, yet their relevancy continuously is influenced by the contemporary process.

In our time, such a shift where the current process 'outdates' the socialisation process has been especially noted in the family sphere, where many people have grown up being socialised to one kind of family, only to find themselves living, as adults, in another kind of family. This is often addressed as a development from a 'traditional' to a 'non-traditional' family setting. In a life course perspective, socialisation influences on gender, including parental relations and images, are continuously reworked in these changing contexts and relations – or reworked as far as individuals find it possible to do so (Holter & Aarseth 1993). Such possibilities have existed in the family sphere, perhaps more so than elsewhere, and yet there is also a lag, expressed, if in nothing else, as a bewilderment about what exactly a family should be.

Family changes have been a remarkably steady background process in the 20th. century, resilient towards shifting opinions and political and economic trends, and one that broadly corresponds to a long-term upwards shift in the status of women and in the emphasis given to gender equal status issues. Love, as ideal of gender, has shifted from a context of authority to one of equal partnership.

In the face of these changes, the common idea that socialisation and tradition, conceived as passive or constraining elements, play a greater role in the family and gender area than in others, seems dubious. In many ways, people's behaviour in the family arena has changed more than behaviours in many other arenas, including many aspects of wage work and public life. At the very least, changes have scarcely been less far-reaching here than elsewhere. Such considerations lead to a view of current gender relations as more importantly influenced by contemporary, societal and cultural patterns than commonly conceived, with the gender market as one main 'dissolver' and 'reconstructor' of former socialisation and family experience.



In the conventional gender study framework, gender is mainly an independent variable; in the present one, we approach it from the other side, as a dependent variable. I should perhaps point out that this is not a minor matter. Most gender researchers agree that gender is a 'social' category, even if there are some reasons to doubt the depth of this agreement. Yet *unless* the social factors that *create* gender are identified, we are left with, either, explaining gender by itself, not explaining it, or going back to the 'sex decides' position. So this is a real barrier, and one does not have to read much in the way of gender, women's or men's studies in order to notice its existence.<sup>4</sup>

Moving out of the gender-explains-gender circle means creating a perspective point outside it, defining categories that can be used to interpret gender constitution, yet are not themselves gendered. This can only be approached through approximations, guesswork, probabilities. My own probability proposal concerns the *activity division*; a sphere of 'producers' and 'reproducers' defined by the main orientation of their activity, towards non-human and human resources respectively. Problems with this proposal are discussed later; for now, it shall serve as perspective point. The production and reproduction categories are not gender-defined, and only weakly related to the biological sex difference.<sup>5</sup>

In view of Parsons' (1994:90-102) idea of the genders as instrumental and expressive orientations, or de Beauvoir's (1961) portrait of transcendence and immanence, the idea of interpreting femininity and masculinity respectively as an 'inner-objectivating' (reproduction) and 'outer-objectivating' (production) activity orientation is not very original. The method differs, however. The activity orientations are seen as historical, and the link between gender and orientation is not conceived as a direct one, but one that is mediated through economic and other relations. Instead of going from an assumed inner nature or character of men and women, we examine the character of society, in order to understand the context that creates these attributions. The idea is not to uncover gender as such but to understand why a highly distinct and in many respects unique modern gender arrangement, surrounding a dual organisation of households and jobs, appears as a matter of gender as such, of bodies and timeless attractions.<sup>6</sup> For the moment, I focus only on the value forms part of social forms analysis; this subject is certainly complex enough as it is, and it is also a subject that cannot be bypassed, if we are to understand other forms.<sup>7</sup>

The partner selection process, now, is more than a series of personal meetings; people also meet as potential or future producers and reproducers, and a societal relationship is recreated in a person-to-person form. Two main areas of the social structure are linked in this manner. Does gender make sense in this perspective? Is this link in fact a core pattern in gender interaction?

One might object that if the problem at hand concerns oppression of women, one should proceed straight to this subject, and that the whole 'code' idea complicates things needlessly. Yet patriarchal stratification in modern society does not advertise its presence. There are many reasons to believe that the gender code expresses relations that are in fact hidden, or not easily accessible, elsewhere. We cannot go 'directly' to the family since what we see, then, is *gendered* family, we must work with the code itself. We cannot go 'directly' to the economy, since what we will see, then, is once more *gendered* economy, though now mainly (in the case of wage work and



other monetary economy) in its contrary, 'neutral' form. We cannot go *directly* to patriarchy, since patriarchy, in most senses, is not directly present.<sup>8</sup> As far as commodity mediation is involved, we are well advised to look for twists in the representational chain of the 'feminine passivity = household activity' type discussed above.

Instead of the notion that gender is a difference which is then linked, I believe there is a link which is then differentiated.<sup>9</sup> An exchange, caught 'in the act', makes people socially equal. At the same time, they are made into different people, even opposites. This is easily interpreted as if a social similarity (or commonality) is created across a divide or dissimilarity that already exists, and this is true in the single case. If we consider the gender system as a whole, however, the opposite rule appears. It is the type of connection that creates the form of difference, a 'polarised' organisation. This must remain somewhat opaque for now (it is further discussed in chapters 8 and 9), yet we may note one typical pattern that appears also on a personal level.

In gender-related exchange as in other exchange contexts, the basic requirements of exchange appears as timeless, a natural state of affairs. This archaic backdrop is very much present in gender affairs, also when it curiously appears right in the middle of utterly modern forms of contractual and individualistic negotiations between men and women. It has a bottom line: "I do this (concrete, modern) due to that (abstract, archaic)". "I do so-and-so because I am a man".<sup>10</sup>

Gender relations, and especially gender in the generic sense, appear much more a-historical and non-societal than, say, the framework of exchange and negotiation between social classes. Some of this is understandable as a consequence of the non-monetary and one-to-one character of gender-related exchange, the subdued and implicit character of a market in attractiveness, and related traits connected to the transfer type itself. Disregarding this for the moment, what we see is usually an axis between the generic and the individual meaning of gender, and as noted in the last chapter, it is an axis that is operative also within other gender frames. There is a polarity in which being gendered *as* an individual also, paradoxically, implies quite the contrary, non-individual position where every participant shares one trait, gender.

Instead of dismissing this as a rather distorted case of reification, we might turn the whole issue around, and even congratulate the gender market, for, in its way, to inform us, in its condensed and in all senses 'economic' manner, of what this interaction is about. It is not simply a male/female matter or a dual spheres matter. It concerns *connecting individual and societal life*, and its object is the *main agent* of this connection process, that which is 'most gendered', *woman*. It is no coincidence that generic gender meanings tend to collect at the 'woman' end of the scale.

As far as *I* refer to *you* in terms of gendered attractiveness, I simultaneously (1) negate your personal characteristics, (2) reorganise them in terms of a specific difference, (3) evaluate them on that basis, and, through these actions, (4) reassert our mutual or common belonging within a gendered sphere of interaction, our gendered commonality, including rights and duties to interpret each other and ourselves as male and female. As far as I am a *man* doing this, not only do I relate my self to a woman; also, this whole matter of self and other, self and society, is linked through

gender, in its prime capacity, woman. Whatever else, some remarkable 'shorthand notation' is involved here.

By now it should be clear that this 'optic' is not simply misleading. It should be noted that the medium of expression is material, but not due to some concrete material property; 'material' simply means 'sensuously present'.

A market carries 'messages from the past', objectified activity, which, in Berger and Luckman's (1972) term, means 'past objectified subjectivity'. Yet this objectivity is constituted and validated through exchangeability. Put to a point: if it is exchangeable, it 'exists', if not, it does not. For a commodity owner A, the other commodity B not only signifies the value of A's commodity. It also, on a wider level, signifies the whole deal, the very relationship. *The sensuality becomes the sociality, as defined by the practicality.*

This practicality concerns the establishment of A and B as equals, a non-sensuous 'similarity' that is yet sensuously established by the transfer of commodities in the exchange. The materiality, then, takes on a double meaning, for even if it expresses asymmetry and stratification, it also, at least on some scores, remains 'non-subdued', its material self, aside from its value function and yet constantly emphasised by it, with the effect that stratification and opposition alike are shifted, or more subtly reorganised, on this new ground.

One rather basic but also fruitful interpretation of this ground starts from Hegel's master and slave model. The master has a problem: he depends on the slave. Yet this relationship remains fully vertical. Marx's idea of exchange is this master and slave model economically transformed, turned so to speak on its side, with vertical divisions expressed as horizontal ones. These horizontal relations are now both symmetrical and asymmetrical, containing different traits.

Such an interpretation implies that the views of the master as well as that of the slave are brought along and reorganised also, and, further, that the attention to the slave's view may be greater than in many non-exchange relations, since the exchange does revolve around a relationship of equality, and constantly creates ideas that this equality should be *real* and not just illusory. This is usually described among the 'civilising functions' of exchange and capitalism in Marx's works.

Reification means that this sensual or 'cultural materiality' achieves a special role, *as* a communicative medium. It may be argued that the change just described is so important that any theory of signification and symbolism that does not take account of it, will become misleading. This subject falls outside the present scope of discussion, but some main traits can be mentioned.

(1) The equivalent's establishment as common signifier, though in itself it is a sign of nothing; a medium inserted between concrete signs. This is usually discussed in terms of money. In gender market theory, the beauty object serves this role, at least partially, as is outlined below.

(2) The establishment of connectivity through the 'real abstraction' of exchange, including imaginary exchange or pricing. In our context this is the establishment of relationships through gendered attractiveness.

(3) The further transposition of the resulting commonality, or quality as equivalence quality, or in Marx's term, 'capitalist use value'.

Some social form points may be noted. – The materialism constituted by exchangeability seems to just be 'there', to exist as such, due to the way the market works. Yet in practice that is never the case – it is culturally, socially and phenomenologically *formed*. A market is not a machine but a 'subjectivity', a meeting-place of subjects. This is often brought out especially clearly in very complex markets, like the finance market, where everyone knows the importance of 'psychological' factors. The transfer exists only as surrounded by a wider transference field. When market participants meet, they make large use of this field, going backstage in Goffman's term. So on some levels, there is always a transcendence of market rules involved – if only in order to close the deal.

In the notion of gender as code, there is the implication that people are no more and no less societal/natural in the gender area than elsewhere, and that reproduction sphere events are explainable by the same kinds of explanations that apply elsewhere in society. If this is *not* the case, it is not due to some mystical super-social quality of reproduction, but to the narrowness of these explanations originally, i.e. *also* as work life, public life, economic interaction, etc. explanations. What is argued is not that any determinist view that should now *also* be applied in the family sphere, but rather a *theoretical consistency*, a consistent view of people as, basically, the same kinds of people, certainly in different settings, but not in the sense of being societal kinds of people in one sphere and non-societal (more natural, etc.) kinds of people in the other (Holter 1990c).

Further, there is the idea that major aspects of men's as well as women's lives are hidden and reorganised through gender. This is not a symmetrical process, yet it involves both sides. If the feminine is always 'elsewhere', repudiated, made unreal, there is also a dislocation on men's side. The code is not the language of the one, and the silence of the other; it operates behind the backs of both.

## Masculinity as women's work, femininity as men's power

According to value forms analysis, what is expressed as 'exchange value', or in our context as feminine or masculine attractiveness, is *not* the characteristics of the commodity itself, but the social characteristics of the *other* commodity, the one which is posited by the first as *equivalent* for its own value. This perspective is in line with social psychological and other research that puts emphasis on gender identity as a mutual creation where each gender plays a main symbolic role in the other's identity formation. It is important in order to avoid a mechanistic and 'misplaced concrete' view of gender identity.

What we would expect, instead, from a value form which expresses a relation between production and reproduction, or has this core aspect, is a '*cross-over*' *process*, where

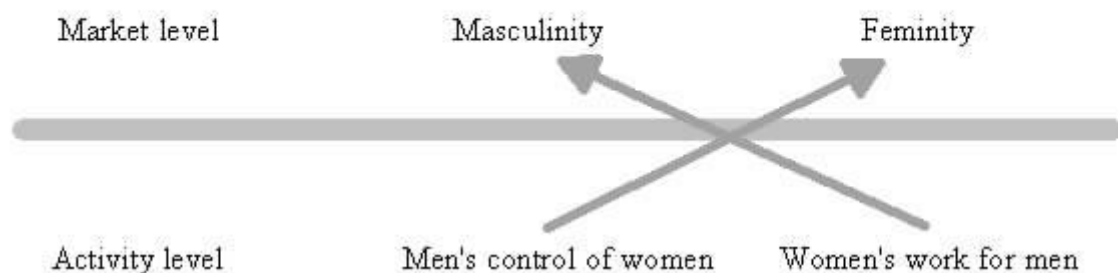
the *sensual* presence of the one sex becomes constitutive of the *social* identity of the other.

If gender relations were fully symmetrical, these positions of 'being expressed in the other' and 'being expressive of the other' would be incidentally distributed among men and women. As discussed previously this is not quite the case empirically in partner selection practices, market-like or not, where instead we still meet the well-known pattern of men's initiatives and women's acceptance or rejection of them. The woman appears in the passive role of giving a yes or a no, in an *equivalent* position, and the man as the initiator, the one making offers, in what we shall call the *relative* position. These market positions of femininity and masculinity, we would expect, express the social character of the relationship in the cross-wise manner introduced above. In this framework, the gender market is seen as the 'tip of the iceberg': what happens there is only one overt form *realisation* of the wider patterns of *valorisation* or *genderisation* that exist throughout the gender system. Some implications of this framework are discussed in this section.

I mentioned the seeming paradox of men's relative activity and women's passivity in the gender market, at the entrance to the domestic sphere, vis-à-vis the contrary situation of male passivity and female activity in the household itself. This outline can now be extended. What we look for, in femininity, is the social character of the *other* commodity, i.e. conditions and connections on the man's side of the affair, and vice versa, in the case of masculinity, conditions on the woman's side of it.

One resulting model can be outlined in the following manner:

#### **A view of asymmetrical aspects of gender identification**



The model is meaningful in terms of tendencies or components of femininity and masculinity. We look away from the dyadic level of gender relations, from other reciprocity matters, and from gender identity in more concrete and personal senses, and focus on the asymmetrical level alone. There is a tendency towards asymmetrical control on the one hand, and a tendency towards non-compensated labour on the other. This is the probable background pattern existing *before* the staging of gender. In the gender system, however, this stage is experienced as already existing, and the societal activity sphere relationship is latent, not immediately apparent for example in the household, even if activities in a more concrete sense are present there.

In this model, asymmetrical control and ownership become manifest not primarily in men or masculinity, but in the character of *femininity*. This is what is brought forth in overt form in the gender market in the 'sex object' role of women, an equivalence position vis-à-vis a series of male offers. According to value forms analysis, it 'sticks' to femininity generally, if only in the sense that the public life activity of women is easily perceived as if it meant becoming less feminine. In order to understand why this happens, we shall have to investigate *men's* social existence in general and men's relationship to patriarchy in particular. Attributing it to women's inner nature, sensuality or character means accepting the *fetish* created by the reification, the misleading image of what goes on.

Certainly women's own experiences come into any concrete formulation of femininity, yet these are in turn deeply influenced by the abstract process. This has been a main theme in feminist theory, concerning how an 'other-image' becomes women's 'self-image'. Yet the background of this process, the model suggests, cannot be found on women's side, or within women themselves. The commodity placed in the equivalent position reflects value – not its own value, that is, but the value, social worth or position of the commodities that express themselves in it. This means, for example, that if love power is the specific capacity sought by men in the gender market, its constitution cannot be clarified by looking at women's lives or situation alone.

On the other hand, the societal character of *women's* activities, i.e. their real meaning for society at large, is not directly expressed in femininity<sup>11</sup>, but backwards, in distorted ways, in masculinity. It appears in the commonly agreed-upon point mentioned in the introduction – that men somehow are more responsible for society at large than women, they have a larger 'social volume', whether for good or bad. The initiator role in the gender market is part of a wider pattern, what women (and men themselves) may experience as men's extended sense of self, what I call a sense of *firstness* (Holter & Aarseth 1993:197pp.). Although overt 'ego inflation' may have become less relevant today, the underlying pattern is still in evidence, and it is often connected, as we would expect, to men's work and career traits. This firstness is generally accorded some legitimacy, even if, by implication, it ranks the other as second. It is precisely a kernel point of commodity logic that such imbalances are presented horizontally, as a purely qualitative difference. As I said, this happens not only in the market sphere, but also in the activity sphere itself, in the abstract or valorising background giving meaning to concrete activities.

As can be seen, even a simplified model that shows gender-related stratification *as* differentiation, i.e. according to commodity rules of expression, may be useful as an initial approach. Gender relations, considered as commodity relations, give a partly upside-down picture of the real relationship between the participants, distorting the societal meaning of activities below the value surface and the power relations connected to them. The immanence of femininity and the transcendent capabilities of masculinity can be grounded in this societal context.

Further considerations regarding the form of expression support this conclusion. If commodity form logic is of importance in the gender system, we would expect differences between femininity and masculinity to become sensually manifest in a staging that hides its own tracks. There should be a 'spontaneous' tendency to look,

precisely, in the direction of the sensual and material in order to explain what goes on. We would not expect commodity principles to become manifest in the same way as in the monetary sphere, partly due to the dyadic and non-monetary character of gender relations, and more basically because of the *counter-positioning* of the gender system which is further discussed later (chap. 9). Value should appear as its opposite, use value, and yet these use values should not behave like use values in the ordinary sense, but should instead on closer look display value-like characteristics. We would expect them to be fully abstract, and thus congruent with a highly modern setting, and yet experienced as timeless or archaic. Unlike other use value-related traits ('personal differences'), the use values related to gender ('sex differences') should take on a social magnetism all of their own, and appear as *determinants* of further contact. Finally, we would expect continuous attempts to "ground" or safeguard this code through sensuous materiality. There should be a constant pressure towards making the body stand up, so to speak, and take responsibility for our doings, and a flow of explanations in this direction attracting spontaneous, 'natural' appeal.

The analysis does not imply that commodity aspects are all there is to gender. It is based, simply, on the assumption that they are of importance, and that gendered commodity relations in the gender system (as elsewhere) validate the value or social worth<sup>12</sup> of the commodity. They establish the identity of its owner as a *social* identity, as one that disposes traits or use values that are relevant also for others. The commodity in the equivalent position thereby functions as a social mirror that tells the individual that her or his acts are in fact *social* acts.

As discussed earlier, the exchange level can be further subdivided. The four main categories are presented here.

### Two levels and two positions of gender market exchange

	<i>Relative position</i>		<i>Equivalent position</i>
<i>Dyadic gender</i>	The man	=	The woman as subject
<i>Gender as woman</i>	The man's property	=	The woman as beauty object

This is a model of a two-layered, non-monetary, personalised, dyadic exchange between two societal spheres of activity, interconnected by partially asymmetrical one-to-one relationships. The model has some interesting properties also from a gift relations point of view. We may perhaps say that the upper level points towards gift giving, while the lower points towards *sacrifice*.

The dyadic level corresponds to what Marx called 'simple', 'elementary' or 'incidental' exchange relations. The relation has a personalised, even singular form, as we saw in the gender market context, where participants stop evaluating others and start approaching each other as *the* one. Gifts, then, may also be part of the wider commodity relation, and it should be noted that there are no *formal* barriers here, in the transfer itself, since the basic configuration (commodity or gift A *vis-à-vis* one other commodity or gift B) is the same regardless of whether the relation is a gift

relationship or a commodity relationship. The form is 'incidental', which means, for example, that giving a gift with a view to the return may be perceived as only 'incidentally' resembling commodity logic. In this quite liberal respect, gender market interaction differs from monetary gender relations, for example in prostitution. Gifts are often '*materially vulnerable*' since they can be exchanged, or treated as commodities, while commodities are '*morally vulnerable*', and in ways that may easily make them *kaput* as commodities too.

A main point of the analysis concerns the fact that commodities that are positioned in the equivalent position tend to take on money-like characteristics and monetary functions. As seen from the point of view of the equivalent, the commodities in the relative position appear as units in a long series (or in the gender market context, a string of offers), each of which are evaluated in terms of the equivalent.

### Differential substitutability of gender market commodities

#### *(A) Gender market relations*

Male offers	A		
	B		
	C	=	female equivalent
	etc.		

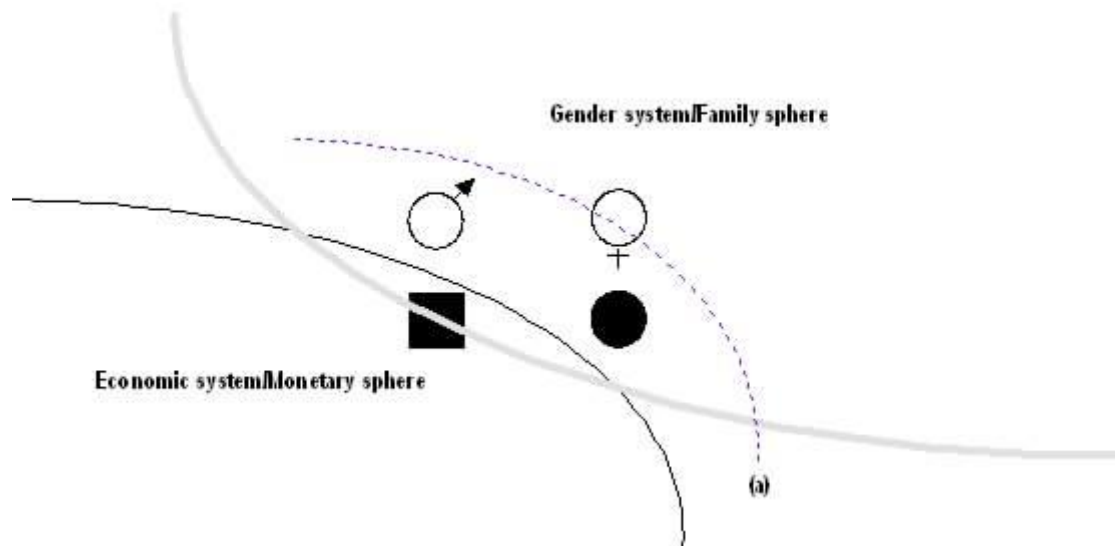
#### *(B) Society at large*

Men's capacities	=	monetary equivalent
		female equivalent
		(other equivalents)

The gender market context of male offers mirrored in a female equivalent involves capacities that at the same time, when we turn to society at large, are also exchangeable into other equivalents, primarily money. As before, we disregard the dyadic or symmetrical level, where men's and women's offers are equally restricted to the gender system, and where the positions of relative and equivalent varies, or shifts incidentally, between the two.

This may also be pictured in a bird's eye view, using the exchange notation introduced in the last chapter. In order to give a wider orientation, two main spheres are included, even if these have not fully been defined yet.

### The dual-level gender and sphere relationship



The model shows gender market area as part of a wider gender system (grey line). The man's neutral capacities (black square) do a sort of double deal: they are valid both in the gender sphere, and in the monetary sphere. The model can be made more complex and nuanced, for example in terms of "job-related, instrumental capacities" *versus* "love, care, etc. capacities" that are present in both sexes. In order to clarify the main picture (and one main tendency), I keep it simple here.

We may consider *prostitution* in this perspective, represented in the figure by the stippled line (a). In prostitution, the monetary sphere has been extended to this line. The relationship involves the woman's object position, and some of her subject position also, with the result – as reported by much literature on this subject – that she experiences a personal split and degradation, at least in the sense that she tries to keep her own love life as far away from this deal as possible.

## Different positions, different views

Women and men often experience the social world differently. These differences have at least four main bases – the power relationship between the sexes, the divergence of men's and women's concrete activities, dissimilar positions in reciprocity terms, and their unequal positions in the value relations of the gender system. The last of these four is the topic of analysis here. It plays a more important role than commonly acknowledged, and even if it is not the only background issue for understanding differences of world view, it influences the three others also.

The context is no longer the gender market as a delimited set of arenas, but the valorisation of the wider gender system, so far only formally defined as 'relations that make sex socially relevant'. The approach follows the standard assumption in value analysis, namely that the market or realisation zone is connected to an activity zone, and that the latter is characterised by valorisation as well as by concrete activities. Valorisation is provisionally referred to as "genderisation", a topic further discussed later. In general, valorisation means that the market reaches into the activities organisation itself, or that the contract influences the subsequent activities. These activities or concrete matters are *qualitatively posited* as abstract, value matters, or as "gendered" matters.



Summarising value forms analysis, Zizek (1995:24) writes: "The commodity of A can express its value only by referring to another commodity B, which thus becomes its equivalent (...) the body of B becomes for A the mirror of its value. (..) The property of 'being-an-equivalent' appears to belong to it even outside its relation to A".

In other words, the value positions, and that of the equivalent especially, do not dissolve just because the exchange is not immediately at hand. In gender contexts, they are seldom far away on a symbolic level, since value properties appear as generally valid.

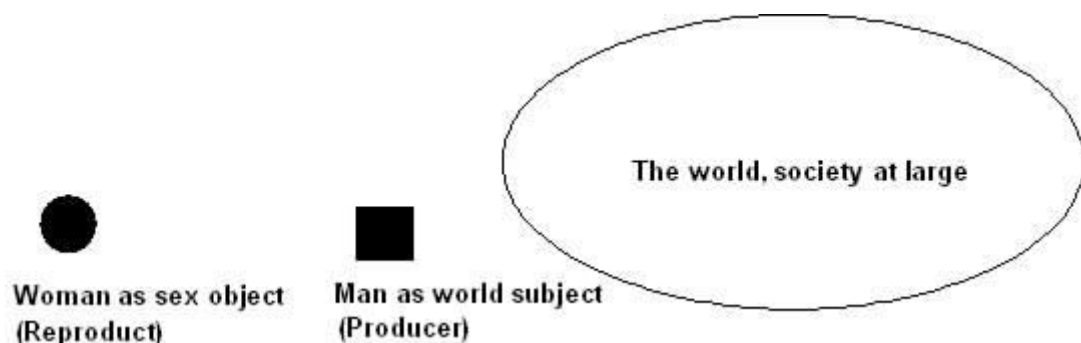
These positions create two perceptual modes or 'practical epistemologies'. The two are most overt and most easily approached in the gender market context. For simplicity I assume that men are in a relative position, women in an equivalent position, on the asymmetrical level of the exchange.

In this context, those in relative positions will tend to see the world around them as *homogenised* by the equivalent, or as *sexualised*, while participators in the equivalent positions will tend to emphasise diversity and individuality within a certain, wider, gendered frame. Each 'offer', as seen from the equivalent position, seems to be a matter of the personality and type of man. For those making these offers, on the other hand, it seems as if they are all accepted or turned down in terms of the same quality – the female equivalent or the beauty object.

The *differential substitutability* or different degree of restrictedness of gender resources is important here. As mentioned some resources (parts of the commodity or 'rights package') offered in the gender market may also be offered elsewhere, while others are restricted, or mostly restricted, to this arena of relations. A man's money holds good elsewhere also; a woman's beauty, even if it may be influential in some indirect senses also outside ('beautiful is good' rule), comes into its own only here.

Thereby we may explain why men, even if they are more 'genderising' (or sexualising) than women in partner selection, are nevertheless less prone than women to use gender as a central part of their perspective outside this area. This is understandable, if we admit that what men offer in gender relations is more likely to be exchangeable also in other contexts, compared to what women offer. Even if men's offers are 'homogenised' or mirrored by the equivalent, inside the gender sphere, they are neutralised, or de-genderised, by being mirrored by other kinds of equivalents outside this sphere.

### **A genderising view of the world**

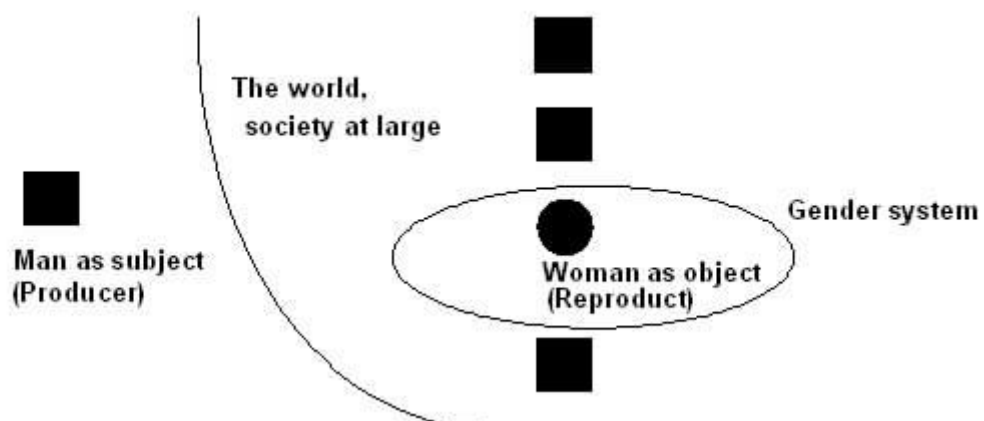


The figure shows the sex or beauty object on the left-hand side, and how the world appears *as perceived* from this position, looking rightwards in the drawing. There is a relationship to a man, not as person, but as representative of resources. Once more it is only the asymmetrical level that is presented. *Through* this relationship, a wider relationship to the world is constituted. As seen from the equivalent position, therefore, the world will tend to become gendered, there will be a constant tendency towards emphasising gender vis-à-vis other aspects of the world.

Quite a different result should be expected on the other side, in the relative position where men mostly find themselves. We may keep the focus on "why gender appears as more important to, and associated with, women, than with men", since this question is in fact a core matter regarding many other differences of view also. Beyond diverging views regarding *what* gender should mean, conflicts concern *if* it should be seen as important and meaningful for the individual.

In the relative position another perception should appear, if our analysis so far is correct. The tendency should be to shrug one's shoulders towards the claims of gender's importance, and place gender back in a row of things, a series of matters. This tendency is illustrated in the figure below.

#### A neutralising view of the world



In this 'neutralising view' model, we once more perceive the world from the left-hand position, facing the right-hand part of the figure, and once more it is only the asymmetrical relation that is presented. Since the man's resources or control on this level are in fact used outside the gender system, he is presented as 'subject'. *As far as* a man is a representative of these resources, this is how he will tend to perceive the world: his position is objectively confirmed in many ways, notably through money, and women are only associated with one such relationship of confirmation. What is more, the *whole gender system* tends to be perceived in this manner also, as something attached to women.

So, put to a point, if we consider these two perspectives in combination:

For *femininity as equivalent value*, there is no existence unless it emphasises gender, or even says *gender before all*, while for masculinity as relative value, things look quite different, more like *gender among other things*, or even *all else before gender*.

Men tend to look at gender as *one in a series*, since the equivalent of gender *is*, for them, one of a series. Women make gender the one before the series, the one *leading to* the series, since gender does, for them, play this wider role.<sup>13</sup>

We may note that the male view is quite similar to the *public eye* vision of gender as described by Jeff Hearn (1993), a fact that says something of the character of our society. Also, it becomes clearer, now, why a defence of a 'world epistemology', like the one in the present text, based on the argument that all neutrality is not neutralised masculinity, may easily slide into the gestalt presented above, unless one takes care to avoid it. This happens all the more easily, since according to value forms analysis, these two 'alignments' of perception – I would not call them distortions, since both contain some truth – are *not symmetrical*. That is, the value form sticks more solidly to the equivalent position than to the relative position. "The fetishism of the commodity form is more striking in the equivalent form [i.e. equivalent position] than in the relative form [relative position]", Marx wrote (1975:91 my trans.). This is the centre of reification in the commodity form as a whole. This has several epistemological consequences. It certainly does not imply that the insider's view gives full clarity, but it indicates that those who perceive the equivalent position from the outside are at least as prone to be misled, and in some senses more so. Possibly it also indicates that the relative view is more realist regarding the world at large, while the equivalent view is more realist regarding the relationship to the other.

Power differences influence the two perceptions of the world. Here we come into a more well-known terrain in feminist theory: men take their position simply as the 'normal' position, and tend to put themselves above the whole relationship. Women take over some of men's view, and therefore also often tend to see gender as insignificant and regard women as inferior. The equivalent epistemology is in a sense itself the product of struggle, a process in which it has been formulated in more theoretical ways, in feminism.

A later argument must briefly be anticipated here. The equivalent epistemology does not perceive men as 'substantial', but rather as 'transubstantial'. The world is substantiated *through* men, or through the masculine or instrumental traits that men are associated with. On the other hand, men themselves become perceived as subjects through this link. This is why men gain a larger 'social volume' for good or bad. At this point, also, women's view of men and the *patriarchal* image of men have some important common characteristics that distort the reality of men's lives. Men's firstness or socially voluminous subjectivity on a basic but usually hidden level make each man a misfit. Men's turning away from personal matters is not simply a matter of free and informed choice. As I said, the dislocation of the subject happens on both sides of the relation, not just on the women's side. One fairly clear consequence, which once more is not so easily explained on the level of men's power, is men's lack of attention to their own health and bodies, resulting in a significantly shorter lifespan compared to women (Holter 1989a). If many men wander happily into a larger social volume, they also lose part of themselves on the way. While this is obviously related to male dominance, it also has another side of being set up, coopted and alienated, which has only recently emerged on the research agenda (cf. chapter 6).

The equivalent epistemology may be seen as a latent or informal angle among women in a traditional setting, an angle that becomes more overt in a feminist context, where

it is made into an 'optic' for understanding the world. When women criticise men for not understanding the consequences their actions have for other people, or emphasise the relational aspect of events, it does not simply mean that everyone should now act 'relationally': it is also a view that stems from a position where everything, the world at large *is* relational in the quite *specific* sense discussed above. I think two lines of thought are typical in the first or immediate feminist formulation of this epistemology: "I have been blind" and "it is men's fault" – which are what we would expect, according to the model. Women *have* perceived the world through men, which does create some blindness and is in a sense men's fault.

The two epistemologies may be counteracted by other tendencies; they are relevant as far as the value forms associations of gender go. As I said, these are tendencies, and whether they are present or not in concrete interaction depends on many factors. I think it can be said that they are very important on a general, cultural level; one does not have to experience much gender-related debate before noticing the two kinds of perceptions outlined. On a concrete level, for example a family context, the degree of asymmetry is obviously of importance. The degree of commodity association also seems important, yet it is possible that some of the practical basis of the two perceptions may be created as much by giving, or sharing, as by exchange-related interaction. Since I see few signs that these other reciprocity contexts really break away from the two, I think this is probable, yet I leave the issue open.

Do more concrete activity differences cut across or change these two views? "The woman experience herself as part of nature", Karin Widerberg (1987:57 my trans.) argues, "she creates new 'nature' and nourishment for it with her body. The man, on the other hand, has an appropriation experience of nature, mediated through hands and head. The woman experiences her whole body as productive, while the man feels he is productive by changing nature with instruments or tools as means. The relationship between the human being and nature is therefore characterised by *yield* ['utbytte'] for the woman, *appropriation* for the man." We may add that most of women's activities have included relations to other people as a main 'production factor'; the fact that the 'object' of work is another human being obviously must play a role.

Nevertheless I believe that the *kind* of role played by such factors depends on the societal context. Some societies have placed 'culture' closer to the women's process, as Widerberg describes it, than to the man's (cf. chapter 11). Others have put an emphasis on a notion of 'intersubjective performance' which differs from the modern view of two forms of production (cf. Sahlins, M 1987). My first point, therefore, is the fact that the two broad views that can be connected to two different activity orientations and to the biological difference have changed in many ways; not too much can be said on that level.

The second point is that the two epistemologies outlined above, or other versions of the contemporary masculine and feminine paradigms, have only an indirect connection to these concrete activity differences. For example, women's use of their bodies for giving birth does not explain why women tend to see gender as that which leads to society, while men tend to ignore or devalue gender. In fact it might have been the opposite, with men putting main emphasis on gender, due to a feeling of inferiority, or similar. If such 'compensatory' mechanisms can in fact be identified in

some contexts, men are more occupied with being neutral in others, and the concrete activity framework does not explain this kind of variation.

The third point concerns social identity on a general level. Like the power difference, activity differences may nuance and contribute to the experience of the reciprocity form. Nevertheless I believe that the latter is primary for social identification, as is further argued later (chapter 7). Activity and power both depend on a background fabric of reciprocity, and it is this background that transforms individuals into social beings. When abstract sensuality – 'activity as such', 'the body as such', etc. – appears as that which *creates* people's identity and basic outlook, a highly specific reciprocity context is in fact involved, if only implicitly. In other historical contexts, people have been more occupied with the shapes of souls than the shapes of bodies, and more with sacrifices than with activities. In feudalism, the spirituality seemed to define the sociality; in capitalism we put sensuality or the sensuously real into this basic role.

Throughout the preceding analysis, there is a conscious narrowing down, a simplification, in order to identify traits that otherwise remain diffuse and opaque. An argument that '*men own women*' is seldom meaningful on the concrete level, yet it makes sense as one general background tendency among others. It must be empirically and theoretically nuanced. Beneath a formal level of economical equality, there is a tendency that men and women are not symmetrically placed in terms of ownership. Men are owners, women not. We may note that this asymmetry becomes greater, the greater the magnitude of ownership, especially in terms of owning *capital*. Further, the analysis does not halt at the doorstep to the home. The sphere of that which is owned by men does not stop at the formal or monetary level. It also to some extent includes women, not as a specifically personal or concrete relationship, but as an average tendency to be found in the background of men's and women's personal relationships. In this more nuanced version, then, the idea that '*masculinity expresses the alienation of women's activities, femininity the ownership of women*' makes sense for interpreting evidence in many areas. Indeed, if this was *not* a deeper-level pattern, we would be at a loss for understanding a myriad of traits that all, as a common refrain, correspond to the asymmetry rules discussed above.

Analysis of this type is sometimes counter-intuitive, and not especially pleasant, more like a x-ray picture than what we would care to hang on the wall – not on *our* wall, that is, not in *my* family, *my* relationship.<sup>14</sup> The avoidance matter reappears: not only are the overtly commercial aspects of partner selection best placed in someone else's lap; further insights gleaned from it are often perceived as if best put away also.

*Inside* each family, the exchange notion of gender, and especially a notion that feminine attractiveness or 'the beauty object' is also in some ways a *soft currency*, an embodiment that fulfils more money functions than just value measurement ('mirroring' the other), is rather unintelligible. Yet by studying how household workers and wage earners actually *transfer* in the typical entrance to the family sphere, in terms of attractiveness as 'price', it becomes intelligible; this price system is in fact connected especially to the monetary functions represented by women. Two considerations are important here.

Firstly, while I *approached* gender as a single case exchange based on balanced attractiveness, the gendered 'attractiveness fabric' *as a whole* has femininity as its key

link, and it is founded on more complex and extended value relations than what immediately appears in the single dyad case. In this wider sense, *woman* precedes *gender*. The rule mentioned in the Introduction, that the women's question preceded the gender question therefore is important also in the economic analysis.

Secondly, both levels of the value relation tendentially lead or point out of the gender system, but in quite different ways. The asymmetrical level points to patriarchal stratification, and so the femininity appearing here is of main importance both for understanding the constitution of the gender system as a whole, and for approaching patriarchy. The symmetrical, dyadic level, however, leads to the form of *signification* associated with gender, what I shall call *sexed organisation* (chap. 8), which *per se* has no connection to stratification, although becoming the 'language' of the latter.

As a final example, one may argue that social asymmetry becomes apparent in the tendency that any exchange between men and women also has an element of exchange of women between men, or more of this element than the contrary element of exchange of men among women. This example, however, also shows the limits of the commodity framework. If we turn to other kinds of relations, notably the more gift-like terrain of many family relations, other and even contrary patterns may appear, like the gift-related tension field that may exist between a woman and her mother-in-law in relation to the man (Borchgrevink, T 1995). So if men are sometimes giants in the economic field, they may be dwarfs in other fields, and these are connected, non-incidental phenomena. The special interest of the gender market lies in its ability to express gender commodity patterns in fairly naked or overt ways, yet not distorted by money, as is the case of prostitution and pornography, i.e. *on their own*.

## Gender as forms of value

The result of these investigations is a view of gender as a value form category, probably best approached not as one form, but as a shifting cluster of value forms, each corresponding to a basic meaning framework. In a paper exploring this theme, called *Gender as Forms of Value* (Holter 1984f, comments in brackets), I argued:

"The extended form in which women are one of many male commodities implies a total form in which many male commodities [i.e. the males' commodities] express themselves in one: women.

But this implication is not realised until two conditions are fulfilled; namely, general exchangeability of male property, labour power included, through wage labour – and a separation of the gender system as a particular type of exchange." Historically, "a separate gender-value system also presupposes some degree of free and individual interaction between the sexes. As long as there is only an exchange *of* women, it is conceived as an exchange between persons whose maleness is presupposed and therefore irrelevant for the transaction itself." (op. cit. 194). In the paper, the contemporary organisation of exchange between men and women was seen on this historical background of exchange of women among men, primarily in the higher classes, i.e. women as daughters/wives between household heads.

"As men's property became more monetarised and exchangeable, each woman became dependent not on a man, but on his general power of exchange, his money. As *the affairs of the master changed, so did the ascribed nature of the slave, and even more important: so did the mode of ascription.*" (op.cit. 195, emphasis added.) This mode of ascription, relating to the symbolic organisation, is a key to understanding the modern gender system.

"The construction of femininity depends both on the substitutability of men's property and on the substitutability of women" (op. cit. 195). Yet these are very different processes; one unresolved problem of the paper concerns differing between societal developments of economic and work relations on the one hand, and the changing institutionalisation of partner selection and family formation on the other. Some of the analysis remains a logical outline, as in the case of the differential substitutability mentioned above, or the differential exchange transfer access:

"We may define two broad classes of gender commodities, objects that are convertible into the monetary system and objects that are not. Money is the primary example of the first category (...) [and especially] monetarised labour power. (..) The monetary commodities that count as gender use value within the system are already engaged outside it. (..) The non-monetary gender commodity, on the other hand, is restricted to the exchange within the system. It tends to be placed in the equivalent position unless the type of gender interaction specifically prevents it." (op.cit. 196-7).

"Exchange of women and the gender system as one part of men's exchanges correspond to the frame element where gender means female [i.e. gender-as-woman], and, like the value form itself, this element is usually an implicit background of others." (op.cit. 197). "*Gender as female is a consequence of the non-gender on the other side of the exchange*" (op.cit. 198, emphasis added).

Here, what was later to become a main research theme of mine, studies of men, is implicated in a quite pointed manner. Clearly this theme does not only (or even mainly) concern men in their overtly masculine capacities, but in their 'neutral' capacities as well.

The paper outlines how dyadic gender exchange also contains more complex value forms (cf. Appendix 1). In relation to the 'total' gender value form and the emergence of gender market institutions, I wrote that "the total gender form is not universal, since it borders on a monetary form into which it cannot develop, (..) reproductive labour cannot [fully] become wage labour. And in an exchange where the commodities on *both* sides are inseparable from the person and where, further, each person counts as a free subject, there is no possibility of any commodity developing [fully] into money. This does not preclude the formation of a sex-object that serves as standard value-measure, but the monetary functions remain ideal." (op.cit. 200). This is imprecise, I think: the 'mirroring' (value measuring) function can be seen as an ideal-level function (as is often done in Marx's work), yet that is not all there is to it, and this function is not all there is to the 'beauty object'.

"The equivalent, according to Marx (1970:58) is a body in which we see nothing but value. But the value-characteristics seem to arise from the natural body itself (..) From this position, the world emerges as a gender world. For the male, on the other hand,

gender appears from the relative position and therefore as a minor, [more] natural matter in the greater gender-neutral world. The views complement each other.

The equivalent is the material, sensuous expression of the relative position. But it appears the other way round, as if the relative position is determined by the equivalent, as if female defines male, as if the man has to be male because she is female." (op.cit. 203). This *appearance* of things is still often made into the basis of ideology, a tendency I find for example in Warren Farrell's recent writings, where he tries to 'free' men from pro-feminist analyses, including his own earlier contributions in that direction (Farrell, W 1975). Farrell (1987) tries to prove that men often are powerless by referring to gender market processes, where the man just has to wait there, in utter pain, etc., depending on the *no* or *yes* from the woman. This is perhaps useful in the sense of voicing a common male complaint.

It is true that the beauty object has a 'class edge' that may hurt men, and there is also an association to women's *being capital* which is further discussed later. Yet this does not necessarily mean that women are the ones who own this capital or control the system in egalitarian terms, rather the contrary, since 'being capital', as evidenced for example in the history of the working class, is usually a rather mixed blessing.

## A feminist analysis of reification

According to the argument presented so far, critical commodity analysis at the 'micro' level can be used in order to interpret gender patterns, associating masculinity with the relative commodity owner position, femininity with the equivalent position. If the commonly applicable rules of commodity form social identification are applicable in this relationship, what follows is a theoretical model that fits some main social and cultural traits.

Although models of this kind belong to the uncharted terrain of feminist theory, especially in the more in-depth detail sense, this area has, in a wider sense, been a main focus of attention in some feminist traditions, especially those emphasising women's position as 'sex objects'.

Catharine MacKinnon's well-known analysis of sexual objectification of women (1982) is a primary or even classic example of this orientation. It has some main points in common with the view presented here, and also some important differences. A brief discussion may therefore be helpful for bringing out the implications of the two. My focus is MacKinnon's objectification analysis itself, and not the wider position it became connected to (known as 'Mackinnonite feminism'). The latter has been criticised for a "deterministic account" of women, a "totalising view of heterosexuality", and an elevation of "pornographic victimisation to the model for all gender relations" (Butler, J 1994:7). These issues are all related to her sex object view.

MacKinnon starts with the argument that "sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism", with *desire* as parallel to *value*. While this parallelism is not without importance (as is discussed in chapter 9), the idea that desire analysis should *replace* work analysis is best conceived as rhetoric, a pointer to the need for attention to desire



and sexuality and the need to move feminist theory out of a narrow work/materialist frame. As a theoretical formulation it is problematical, also in its own terms; MacKinnon's sexuality category is often unclear and sometimes so closely associated with power that the two seem identical (e.g. op. cit. 529).

The gist of her arguments may be interpreted in line with the current framework. Women's activity, as positioned within a specific context, *becomes* 'sexual', creating desire or attractiveness in the eyes of men, while reifying women (and, indirectly, men), and this relationship lies at the core of the gender system. MacKinnon argues that "women's sexualness (..) is no less real for being mythic" (op.cit. 541), and her insistence on the reality of sexual oppression runs parallel to my own emphasis on the reality of the gender market. Yet a focus on attractiveness as a form of value, a price-like expression, differs from focus on desire as a replacement of work and value analysis. MacKinnon's downgrading of work analysis, for example in her portrayal of Rosa Luxemburg as only 'subliminally' recognising women as sexed beings, tends towards the opposite, middle class problem of only subliminally being aware that women are active people in more senses than as sexual beings. By asserting the latter, MacKinnon often comes fairly close to the view she wants to criticise (e.g. op.cit. 521).

My critique concerns two points. MacKinnon's text ventures into the terrain of reification on a personal level, which I agree is of major importance, yet her portrayal of this relationship is partially misleading. There is also a tendency to mistake what is probably best seen, on the whole, as symptoms, for the kernel causal dynamics in the oppression of women.

The first point concerns a *confusion of objectification and reification*. This confusion, I find, is so widespread in feminist theory that is probably best interpreted as something more than a 'mistake'. I address this mistake aspect first.

*If* reification basically means objectification, or can be described by the latter concept, power and alienation by implication become prerequisites of all activity, of work whatever the context, since all work objectifies, creating objective results. The 'objectification is bad' line of thought has not been especially helpful, since it tends to portray social relationships as *inherent* in concrete objects or tasks, i.e. quite the contrary of the critical approach. "Objectification makes sexuality a materiality in women's lives", MacKinnon writes (op.cit. 539), in a formulation that illustrates these problems. MacKinnon uses objectification as if it meant *both* the transhistorical process of activities creating objective results, and the specific process of reification. Elsewhere in feminist literature objectification in the transhistorical sense is often called *externalisation*, as in Sally Scholz's (1993) critique of Hegel for only offering an abstract solution to the problem of alienation – "in the [capitalist] process of production, externalisation becomes alienation". Externalisation, objectification and similar terms basically mean that activities create results, and so when this category is confused with specific conditions, the critical project stands in some danger of collapsing. These specific conditions have been introduced already; they include a context of alienation, an exchange where activity results become 'thing-like' in the sense of *commodity-like* (whatever the material of the commodity, be it an idea, a thing or a cell), so that *human agency* is generally *attributed* to the commodity's sensual appearance.

It is possible, perhaps, to see this dispute as a matter of words, but I do not think that is all. Also, it is conceivable that the choice of 'objectification' instead of reification in much feminist theory may have rather simple explanations; the phrase 'sex object' has stuck, and, further, to 'objectify' is anyway more associated with men and the production sphere than with women. Outer-objectifying activity creates objects as an immediate, sensuous fact, while inner-objectifying activity creates objects that are also subjects, traits or capacities of people that presuppose their own self-activity as part of their creation; these are 'objects' only in a partial, mediated sense. Once again that may not be all, however.

It may also, and perhaps primarily, be the case that the reification process in this area does in fact take on a very 'objective' hue, including the sense of becoming 'objective for oneself'. Such an argument may be connected, for example, to arguments from Christine Delphy, Ann Foreman and others concerning the '*depth quality*' of alienation and exploitation in women's lives, appearing more as a matter of personal sacrifice than as part of a negotiable, exchange-like relationship, or even simply *as* one's self-relationship rather than as something between oneself and others. This is implied by the characteristics of the equivalent position. If gender appears as something that sticks to women, the value relation may appear as women's self-relation.

MacKinnon finds gender closely connected to attractiveness. "Socially, femaleness means femininity, which means attractiveness to men, which means sexual availability on male terms" (op.cit. 531). This is in line with the current approach, yet it is described in a framework where the sexual is something that penetrates women's lives, as if women, or gender, were untainted by it in the first place. This is close to the equivalent epistemology outlined above. In MacKinnon's portrait, the dyadic level disappears from view, and there is the tendency that since gender *includes* exchange of women between men, it *is* only this background patriarchal exchange, or may be reduced to it. She defines "gender socialisation" as the process in which "women come to define themselves as sexual beings" (op.cit. 531), yet unless she would deny that women also became sexual as beings on their own, for themselves, sexuality in her text is conflated with patriarchy, symptom with cause. Gender socialisation, she says, "is that process in which women internalise (make their own) a male image of their sexuality *as* their identity as women. It is not just an illusion." (op.cit. 531). But this is an image created by the process, not simply be men who prefer to "see" women in one way or the other. The beauty or sex position, as we shall see, is not only an object position.

Yet in MacKinnon's analysis, sex object equals victim position, and this tendency can be found in much feminist research around 1980, including my own gender market study. It is interesting as an example of how an analysis that stops halfway, that does not really go into the process, becomes *more* black-and-white, more projective than an analysis which is more radical in the sense of going deeper. MacKinnon basically says *object* and stops there, making this object *absolute*, and so what confronts it is a pure subjectivity, a 'male ideology', easily interpreted in the voluntaristic sense that men make it or choose it and push it upon hapless women. Other phenomena disappear from the picture, like women's view of men, the tendency to view men through the size of their valets. I am not saying that the two positions (or views) are symmetrical, but I do believe they must be interpreted as parts of one system.

MacKinnon argues that sex constitutes gender, not the other way round (op.cit. 531), which I think mainly is untrue. This is further discussed later (chap. 8). The main point, however, is that both are shaped and influenced by the patriarchal structure, a category that is altogether missing from her argument. In her view, instead, the decisive structural fact is described in these words: "The defining theme of that whole [sex/gender] is the male pursuit of control over women's sexuality, men not as individuals nor as biological beings, but as a gender group characterised by a maleness that is socially constructed, of which this pursuit is definitive." (op.cit. 532). I read this as taking the symptoms, like rape, pornography, sexual pressure and harassment, and identifying this range of negative traits with the *causes* of oppression of women, which is an empirically improbable and methodologically unsound procedure. Patriarchy, thereby, is reduced to a 'male pursuit of control', which once more is in line with the equivalent epistemology: the relation to a man as what "leads to the series", what leads to society in general, with the man, therefore, seen *as* this abstract being. Therefore, one does not need to *ask* about patriarchy, it has now been found.

In tendency, this kind of feminism puts patriarchy on the shoulders of everyday men in an everyday private life context, making these men somewhat larger than life. The habitual, equally spontaneous answer from men is to keep to the large size and project the problems back at women. I am not saying all of this is a play with mirrors, yet I do believe that it mainly reflects a process, two parts of a cycle, rather than being an analysis of it. Whenever we make sex the cause, we never stray far from the market, we remain on a level where the sensuality becomes the ground of the sociality. The 'market class' view of the genders (cf. chap. 8), or 'gender groups' in MacKinnon's term, is never far away as explanatory principle. Since the analysis stops at the market level, like Braidotti's analysis discussed earlier, the asymmetry becomes absolute, antagonistic. As I said, this paradoxical result is well known from various 'class against class' ideologies of socialism. So instead of a *common* process with two parties in it, there is an absolute divide creating two different kinds of beings. Since this level is not recognised for what it is, its traits are seen as use value traits, and since no deeper level is recognised, they must carry the whole weight of the analysis. In MacKinnon's case, it is *sexuality* that replaces an analysis of patriarchy, becoming overburdened by negative aspects. Sex becomes "something men do to women" (op.cit. 532), quite in line with the Puritan view. Assertion replaces inquiry: "sexual objectification is the primary process of the subjection of women." Yet this is precisely what we do not know.

In a power relationship, what commonly appears to the powerless is this power, while what appears to the powerful is the benefits from it, experienced as a normal state of affairs. Yet the primary process is *not* necessarily fully perceived by anyone. If sexual reification is part of a wider fabric of exploitation, there is no reason why the latter should be immediately perceivable from any position, and quite a few reasons why it should not, and why, instead, various symptoms would be given status of 'causes' of the whole. I doubt whether rape, for example, is more of a 'cause' of patriarchy than robbery is the 'cause' of capitalism.

I agree with the emphasis on the gender-as-woman level throughout MacKinnon's analysis, as in the statement that "prostitutes sell the unilaterality that pornography advertises" (op.cit. 532). She cites Rowbotham that "women are created thingified in

the head, complicit in the body" (op.cit. 542). "Male power extends beneath the representation of reality to its construction" (op.cit. 539). I agree that there is a power involved which extends to this construction. Yet here the market phenomenon is once more made absolute: we do not know if this male power *in* the competitive market reality that she describes is in fact the same as the patriarchal power *constructing* this reality.

At one main point, hidden in a footnote, MacKinnon's inquiry takes on more of a life of its own, becoming more open and questioning. It is indicative that this happens precisely when she takes the object position as point of departure, something that varies, rather than freezing it into an absolute. She writes:

"Feminism comprehends the *social* world's *object* existence, how women are created in the image of, and as, things."<sup>15</sup> She continues:

"The object world's social existence varies with the structure of production. Suppose that wherever the sexes are unequal, women are objects, but what it means to be an object varies with the productive relations that create objects as social. Thus, under primitive exchange conditions, women are exchange objects. Under capitalism, women appear as commodities. (..) Under true communism, women would be collective sex objects. If women have universally been sex objects, it is also true that the matter as the acted-upon in social life has a history." (op.cit. 538n55).

I find this very interesting, and the *method* which is implicated is close to the method of the present text. I have a few comments. The key point is *variation*, change, i.e. no longer 'being object' as such. The context of this variation is not just 'production', but society at large, including reproduction and intimate relations. Creating objects as social, then, means giving them social, cultural etc. identity. The 'primitive' conditions are empirically doubtful, and discussed later; the method is the point here. In capitalism, the point is not commodities as such, but capital commodities. Yet I shall argue that as far as women are socially created or positioned *as capital*, it is as *counter-positioned* capital, not in a direct fashion (chap. 9). The communism mentioned must be true patriarchal 'communism', *alias* 'communism in women'.

If one adds two major ideas to this outline, the result is a potentially very fruitful framework for analysis. The first idea concerns the contested, multidimensional character of objectivity, the fact that commodity logic has never operated alone, but together with other elements. The second is the fact that this "acted-upon" has also acted *against*, has been *oppositional* as well as just "objectified", within women's its existence in different contexts of "objectivity". In some settings, this has created a "women's struggle"; in others, it has created other forms of struggle. – Taken together, the result is a shift of perspective, away from the absolute divide of male and female, towards a historical process creating different forms of masculinities and femininities.

## The beauty object

"The fact that it is possible to be seen as anonymous even by acquaintances is part of the feminine experience of our society. To be seen as a personality before one has

even become acquainted, is part of the masculine experience." (Holter 1980a:232, my trans.).

If the dyadic level of the gender market contains 'incidental' or 'elementary' exchange relations, often gift-like in their form, these also have a curious uniform character and an element of asymmetry that cannot be explained on that level alone. On the contrary, we saw that the dyadic level as such should give rise to a rich individualistic plurality of genders, or enhance that aspect. Yet the gender market contains deeper-level patterns on which this dyadic level is based, patterns with quite different dynamics.

In my work on the gender market, trying to describe partner selection patterns, I came to a halt in front of the word 'pretty', which seemed so central in this world. I started using the adjective, in italics, as a noun (Norwegian *pen*), as a being on its own, in a vaguely Brecht-like attempt to create an alienation paradox ('*Verfremdungseffekt*'); it seemed that it fully deserved this subject status. Indeed, it emerged as a main definitory subject of the gender market as a whole, and if *I* was thereby led astray, theoretically speaking, as I often suspected, I still could not help noting that my eventual aberrations were quite in line with the *actual* aberrations of most men, as practical participants in gender interaction, and perhaps also with women's, in their attempts to fill this role.

I was surprised by this; it did not fit my preconceptions. Why this weird emphasis on beauty, only skin-deep anyway? What could be the value of beauty? Surely the absolute and even desperate attention given to this beauty standard was a sign of something more than a superficial show-off of status, as in Thorstein Veblen's (1976) description of upper class conditions a hundred years ago; it did not look like a peripheral mechanism. If oppression of women clustered around gain or benefit, as I suspected, what could be the gain in this case? Neither feminist analyses of patriarchy nor Marxist analyses of capitalism gave much clue to an answer, if at all addressing such questions. This was a zone of silence, even if anyone knew that *not* being seen as attractive, or for women especially, *not* being perceived as at least fairly good-looking, touches some very sore spots indeed. It seemed one of the most non-communicated aspects of social stratification, a kind of collective denial, as if a matter too awkward to be grasped in social terms, only understandable if portrayed (and at that stage all the more intensely portrayed) in natural terms.

Possibly sociobiological traits play a larger role here than in other areas of social interaction. Yet they are socially 'overloaded', and the eventual biological background fails to explain main features of the modern arrangement. Why is it given this major emphasis? Why is it emphasised in this context, not others? Why are women, especially, perceived in its proximity? Why is it that the standards of beauty have changed in major ways historically? Why are men's looks at least as emphasised as women's, in some cultures? These are among the traits that are difficult to explain from a sociobiological angle. At the same time, major *social* mechanisms that make natural attributions 'spontaneously right' can be identified.

I turned, therefore, to social interpretations. Starting from the two-tiered analysis of the exchange described above, I came to see 'the beauty object' as a gender-monetary form, a form of 'soft currency', where gendered bodily appearance becomes money-

like in some respects. What is involved here is not the material of money, but some of their economic functions. When a woman's looks function as the equivalent of a longer or shorter series of male offers, and when, moreover, this role is generalised into the supreme mark of attractiveness *as such*, what we have is the monetary 'measure of value' function. As argued, almost everything may become gender-attractive, or brought into this evaluation system; here, however, we meet an object that simply seems to reside right in the middle of it anyway, or even *is* that system, right by itself. This relates to its 'price standard monetary function.

Now, 'extended' exchange turns into 'total' exchange (cd. Appendix 1). Even if this proto-form of money does not directly serve a third main function of money, to be a means of exchange, it takes on the monetary equivalent role of general monitor and standard, culturally expressed in the endlessly elaborated ideal woman-body, with its shadows of body problems and self-conflict. 'The women's room' comes to mind: 'never complain, never explain'.<sup>16</sup>

If gender elsewhere is fluctuating and diffuse, we now come to a more hard-coded part, with sharper edges; a highly condensed social nexus in which major cultural, political, economical and psychological traits come together. Thus the beauty object is also a sales object, or even *the* sales object. A recent study concludes:

"Phone sex TV advertisements (..) deploy the female body as a guarantee of realness, presence, and immediacy (..) *the sexualised image of the female body serves to stabilise the ontology* of the aural, telecommunicative sexual encounter" (McCarthy, A 1993, my emphasis). It is not surprising, perhaps, that the beauty object serves as a 'reality marker' for selling sex – but why also cars, or weapons, or soap? How come it seems able to establish the ontology of sale itself, any sale?<sup>17</sup>

More than before, Marx's simile of the value form as a social hieroglyph is relevant, for the beauty object represents patterns that do not, I believe, find any outright or direct expression elsewhere. The following outline only does justice to some of these traits, for it may be argued that the 'nexus' character of the beauty object, the tightly interweaved social patterns in one naturalised 'package', presupposes a different and more complex method than the one that has been used up to this point. As a main unit of the code, it 'says' a bit too much, or too many things at once; further analyses of the interconnections of patriarchal and economic organisation are needed in order to make sense of it. Some traits can be outlined here, however.

First of all prettiness it that which is to be looked at. It is that which is to be compared, rather than that which does the looking or comparing. So it is something that belongs, in a passive sense, to a person, not so far from George Herbert Mead's (1934) notion of the *me* as opposed to the *I*, yet with a much more specific role and content.

It may be objected that the idea of the beauty position as an object position, and this object as a passive mirror of value, is a man's definition, or a relative position point of view. It is perhaps superficial, a surface trait. Yet it seems descriptive of women's relationships also. While partner selection studies find male initiative on the one side, they also find an indirect activity on the other, among women who play a game of being looked at, giving come-on cues to the right man. This "non-verbal solicitation behaviour" may include "glancing at a man, smiling, patting or smoothing the hair, lip

licking, and head tossing" (Moore and Butler 1989). It is true that both parties administer and present a certain position, but it is also true that women's position involves themselves as objects in a way that differs from what goes on among the men.

If the equivalent is a body of value, others' value, it is not a body for and in itself. At an abstract level, therefore, I think it is correct to say that the beauty object is in principle passive, silent, blind. The sentence "the pretty woman looks at the world" can be interpreted to mean "the pretty woman looks at the world, including herself as pretty". In a real sense, the world always looks at the pretty woman, and the beauty object position is 'transmitted' precisely through this act. I do not say it is 'constituted', for a wider, deeper-level process is involved in its constitution, and the look is better interpreted as its end stage. So I do not think the beauty position is a position in which women can see others, or see themselves, but always the one to be seen, also in the sense that its 'subjectivity' may be experienced as exactly this need for being looked at, given attention, being appraised.

The equivalent epistemology, described above, therefore seems to involve a 'double negation'. First there is the negation of immediate perceptual reality, which instead becomes a 'service reality', or as Marx says of the equivalent, 'its function is merely to serve'. Next, however, there is a retransformation, – both because the woman is still a subject, a human being, but also because this servitude of the equivalent in some important senses represents *power* in our world. This power aspect is discussed later in relation to capital. Even the first aspect is quite complex and I am not sure I can interpret it. For simplicity I keep to the metaphor of looking, and as before I discuss the asymmetrical level only.

The woman does not simply look at the world *as* that which is being looked at, but *as* that which looks (first negation), *as* this is related to, or returned to, that being looked at (second negation). There is a two-way relationship that involves the 'imagined eyes of the man', the way in which the woman perceives the man's 'view of women' in a very wide sense. And to make things even more complex, this 'return' is not a *sensuous* relationship, not a 'perception' in the ordinary sense, if the preceding analysis holds true; it is precisely the 'supersensuous' practical relationship of the real abstraction. We may perhaps say that the man, as masculine in a purely abstract sense, mediates the woman's self-relationship. Although the details of this relationship remain opaque to me, it clearly involves a conception of men as fully abstract, societal beings precisely *as* personal beings, related to women, a conception or in Žižek's term 'staging' that may be necessary for parts of women's self-conception.

Other major elements also appear in relation to the beauty object, matters that have only been peripherally relevant in the gender analysis so far. There is an *absoluteness* and *insatiability* which is not easily explainable in an individual commodity owner market, or what Marx would call a small ownership or petite bourgeoisie setting. We are led, rather, towards large-scale or even specifically capitalist conditions, not the 'this-for-that' principle of simple exchange, but the *never enough* principle of surplus value production.

At first sight this statement might seem too wide or misleading. Yet it is warranted by a variety of phenomena surrounding the beauty object, and it is, I think, a general rule

in this area. Thus, in the gender market context, 'beautiful enough' is a contradiction of terms, there is always more beauty to be had, or more beautiful women, not as a peripheral phenomenon, but as a main part of gender market imagination, an imagination which here also reaches its most practically 'effective' stage, manifested in the selection patterns of men. If attractiveness, in other respects, is often only a vague half-reality, dissolvable into personal preferences, in this respect it emerges as the basis of a major industry, a beauty business. If this is a commodity, it qualifies as a specifically *capitalist* commodity – nothing is ever enough, there is a need that can never be fully satisfied, since 'need' in the conventional meaning of this word was not what was involved in the first place, but rather something akin to a relentless drive.

The psychic and somatic problems in the shadow of the beauty object have this same remorseless and absolutist quality, especially in the area of women's relationship to their bodies, which sometimes resembles an internal, privatised which hunt, performed no longer by external authorities, yet scarcely less effective by being driven by those inside. What does it 'say', in a contextual interpretation? "My body must be beautiful, or it may as well die, I am willing to starve myself to beauty, for this *I* no longer is the *I* of the body, or simply *me*, but precisely an *I* of this remorseless process itself: in this way I do sense myself"? The self seems to find the body worthy only as value-like, either rejecting all use value, or appropriating it all, like surplus value, or the two in some endless combination. Anorexia and bulimia may have old traits, but they are also very contemporary diseases, as Elisabeth L'orange Fürst (1995:338, my trans.) observes in a study of the 'language' of food: "the anorectic of today emerges as the pointed expression [*spissformulering*] of the problematics of femininity in our society." The body is not good enough; what is *there* is not good enough. And this, in turn, seems to implicate that to *be* is not to 'be there', in this static sense, but to be in the sense of 'more, more'. We may perhaps use Baudrillard's term and argue that reality has become unbearable, and so only hyperreality will do. This is no longer 'value' suppressing 'use value', but rather value *as* use value. The anorectic does like the follower of Ricardian political economy, counting value in energy units, now in the form of calories; life now is 'inside' their production process, or as Fürst rightly emphasises, removed from pleasure in any ordinary sense. In my view, it is precisely this value-in-process aspect that makes these diseases – or their modern, folk epidemic character – so dangerous (and also the longing for 'something else' so absolute), for there is more than a static (and small-property-like) estrangement from one's body involved here. – This may be speculative, yet I see no reason to doubt that the psychological dislocation of the subject here is linked to a wider sociological dislocation, and further, it seems likely that it is related to commodity form logic. When reports say three quarters of women dislike their own bodies, as discussed by Fürst, the standard is the commercialised beauty body. I also think this goes *beyond* the overt sense of the market, or the other-directedness of David Riesman (in *The Lonely Crowd*); instead, value becomes 'inner principle', 'absolute use value', as part of what I call repressive devalorisation.

No wonder, then, that the beauty object is double-edged also in the gender market context, to be strived for, and yet somehow destructive – not perhaps sinful, as in the traditional view, but alienating, and often experienced in such terms by men as well as women. The greater the emphasis on the beauty object, the greater the tension and the chance of conflict. If it is to be 'had', there is the constant suspicion that it will keep circulating, as if this was its major role in the first place. According to conventional



wisdom, being left behind by a person should be worse than being left by a beauty. My impression is that the empirical trend is the opposite, although my evidence is indirect.

This absolutism or hard edge also emerges in terms of sex, for in the beauty object, the sensuality and the materiality go into a kind of clinch. I think it is correct to say that the beauty object is a purely feminine category, and that even if women may 'give back with the same coin', look at men as more or less attractive bodies, and so on, all this remain echoes or counter-proposals in the face of a much wider and deeper process. *If* women had really been able to "answer" men on this account, the whole account would have been in a process of dissolution, according to the present analysis. The argument is not that men's looks are irrelevant, but that they play a qualitatively different role, as *part* of what is offered, rather than a *key* to the rest. Lise, interviewed in the gender market study, says: "How you look is the gateway. Next, other things matter." For women, looking at men, things are different. Eva says: "But for me, a boy does not need to look like the perfect ideal. As you get to know him, you can see many fine, beautiful sides of him." A man's looks are perceived as part of his person and sphere of status and control.

It may be objected that women do in fact turn some of this around, evaluating men in some of the same ways that men evaluate women, and that the argument holds true only if we consider *traits* instead of *persons*. In principle, then, the feminine trait is always 'looked at', used as mirror, while the masculine trait always 'looks'. I do not deny that there is some partial reality to this, yet I disagree with analyses where traits become fully separated from people (as in Séve, L 1978); there is a point where feminine and masculine traits are intelligible only if we presuppose a relationship between gendered *people*, men and women. There is some flexibility here, but it is limited, as is discussed later in a theory of exploitation framework (chap. 13).<sup>18</sup>

In interviews, men may tell of former relationships, saying 'she was the perfect woman, that was exactly the problem'; love turning into jealousy. Personal background and fears aside, the jealousy has a 'rational' kernel, an expectation of market circulation, i.e. a perception of the other, in this mode, *as* a circulative other, and once more, this is more than a purely metaphorical association to money.

If we look more closely on the man's side of the affair, keeping to the rule of cross-wise gender expression discussed above, this feeling of alienation is not so strange. It is arguable whether the beauty object *only* belongs on the deeper gender-as-woman level of the exchange, or *mostly* belongs at this level – what is involved, anyway, on the man's side, is a principal *absence*. *He* as a person is not there. His personal sides are not what counts – or less, now, than in other patterns of attraction. He is there *as* representative of a much wider, and in our first approximation very hazy category, one involving 'what men owns'. We may also say that he is there *as* representative of patriarchal ownership, even if this notion scarcely clarifies things at the present stage. What can be found empirically is a tendency that *as far as* the woman is present in the beauty object role, the man is present as something more, or beyond, himself. This is what I approached in terms of what the man owns or controls, or even this control or successfulness itself, which should inform his personality, and yet is no longer related to it.

All these problems are in a certain sense to be expected, according to the analysis so far. If the beauty object outshines all others, its social background should appear much like a black hole, a focal point of energy, yet emitting no light. Conceived *as* a money-like object, or a circulative unit, the beauty object points to the class and intra-sex ranking aspects of the gender market. It involves especially 'marked' cases of the general rule that women's gender-related choices may be emancipatory in gender terms, yet oppressive in class terms.

This is like conceiving money in the sense of having more of it, or less of it, or nothing, i.e. from an eminently practical angle. Yet this view does not explain the money functions or the monetary unit as such. It does not explain why social class and ranking are especially implicated in *this* way, instead of others.

At that level, instead, the beauty object, as a kind of proto-money based on its own bodily material, serves to *dislocate* the class system from the gender system. Despite plastic surgery and fashion industry, attractiveness remains much more object to natural anatomic factors than class traits. Therefore the gender market, represented by persons looking for beauty as the paradigm of attractiveness, develops dynamics that do not correspond to what could be expected from a class model of partner selection alone. Indeed, the most striking trait of the gender exchange, the central mirror-like position of the female body, falls out of the picture in a model of class homogamy. It was not explained by Willard Waller either, since pointing out the connection of dating and rating, like he did, is not the same as analysing its central link. The importance of the attractive body goes beyond conceivable needs of class regeneration, and must instead be explained on its own terms, in its relationship to the gender system and patriarchy.

For now, this question must be left unanswered. If the exchange relationship is one in which each commodity becomes the material or body expression of the otherwise hidden social character of the other commodity, we have a framework for further analysis, one suggesting the possibility of a more specific bodily beauty object function. It can be traced further according to different assumptions about family formation, the gender system, patriarchal organisation and the sphere relationship. The code, as argued, cannot be examined on its own, and in the next chapters, I turn to its surroundings, focusing on gender relations that do not exist on their own in a market-like context, but are instead interweaved with other relations especially in the family sphere.

As a final suggestion, it may be argued that the position associated with the beauty object is precisely *between* that of the 'object' and the 'subject'. This relates to Spivak's argument that the feminine is produced and erased at the same time (cf. Butler, J 1994:18), and similar views. It *is* neither subject nor object. It represents something between and beyond, and this includes a kind of 'time bridge'. The latter becomes meaningful if we conceive of the gender abstraction as a 'time gap'. Gender performance means bringing the past back into the present, since the staging or abstraction in principle always operates in the past tense: "how does this man/woman in front of me compare to my image (already there) of the ideal man/woman?" The abstract gender is never caught in the act, but always a result of acts, or, principally, activity in the sense of past – Marx: 'dead' – activity. What participants do is to re-engage it as means to the future. But if participants are now-only, subjects-only, the

beauty is now *and* then, value incarnate in the present, or a final proof and validator of this bridging process.

## Critiques of the gender market approach

The book versions of the gender market thesis, published in Norway (1981) and Sweden (1983), were discussed in number of forums and in the media after the publication. Some general points of critique emerged. My overall theoretical view was criticised on two points especially – putting too much emphasis on gender in value and economic analysis (e.g.. Ericsson 1986; Lysestøl 1992), and too much emphasis on value in the gender analysis (e.g.. Fürst 1994). The general theory points in these critiques are addressed later (chap. 13), and I focus, here, on the more concrete reception of the gender market theory, concerning the following six points: (1) the critique of gender and the gendered reception of this critique; (2) the importance of the gender market as a key patterning of gender practice; (3) the reality and importance of exchange and of asymmetry in the exchange; (4) the existence of non-market patterns, and (5) the importance of the gender market partner selection for later relationship development. I also briefly discuss (6) the significance of gender market theory in terms of current family sphere conflicts and problems.

### (1) The critique of gender and the gendered reception of the critique<sup>19</sup>

The idea that gender is a kind of commodity relationship generally met with scepticism and opposition, not just from the defenders of traditional gender roles, but also from many within the emerging women's and gender studies, as well as among radicals and Marxists. Often, a moderated version of this thesis was accepted, namely that gender, as a broader category, does have some peripheral commodity aspects in certain overtly commercial circumstances. A commodity view of gender was easily perceived as unsettling or negative, compared to a view in which gender could be remodelled and changed in an egalitarian direction. This has contributed to a lack of in-depth critiques and alternative theories regarding the commodity aspect of gender, and to partner selection remaining an understudied area in Scandinavia. It is my impression from much subsequent debate that whatever the *actual* relationship between gender and commodity relationships, gender *should not* be described in commodity terms.

If disappointing on one account, I found this reaction interesting in other respects. It was remarkably *gendered*, diverging into two typical responses, one from women, the other from men.

Women usually did not object to the idea that partner selection and gender relationships contain *asymmetry* in women's disfavour. What they did object to, however, was a commodity critique view of this asymmetry, and especially an exchange view of partner selection. Love relations should be analysed in terms of gifts rather than commodities; doing otherwise was objectionable, especially when extended into notions that gender and femininity itself are value categories. In a number of discussions feminists first rejected, most vehemently, a *value* approach, only for next, perhaps as a compensatory manoeuvre, to paint an all the more bleak

picture of oppression of women in *use value* terms. This 'all the more' tendency surfaces also in the domestic labour debate, of which more will be said later.

*Men*, on the other hand, often did not object to the exchange view, which seemed to fit their experiences rather well, including the emphasis on the beauty object. What they objected to, instead, was the assumptions regarding the continuous existence of asymmetry, which should rather be seen as a thing of the past. So a commodity framework should keep to the upper, symmetrical level of the market.

In sum, then, if the critique from men denied the existence of the gender-as-woman and exploitation level, the critique from women often dismissed the existence of the exchange element.

Do I exaggerate the 'symptomatic' aspect of these responses by using words like 'denial'? Perhaps. On the other hand, I find it indicative that these forms of critique did not engender much in the way of other, alternative solutions. Instead they created a zone of silence. Therefore, I believe both responses are indications that the original thesis was not totally misplaced. They are also fairly striking illustrations of the gender value form epistemologies discussed above. Men did indeed often argue as if gender was 'one in a series', whereas women's emphasis on the gift aspect of the relation and the uniqueness of gendered interaction fit the equivalent position view. The more gift-like, the less sex-reifying the interaction, from a woman's position.

What was avoided thereby? I am not sure, but it seems that the two reactions serve to dislocate two main 'embarrassing' facts of modern gender in general, and partner selection in particular. One is the mainly male agenda of dominance. The other is the often female agenda of exchange, including upwards class mobility through the gender system.

(2) Is partner selection a key practice?

Against a 'key practices' approach one may argue, to the contrary, that even if partner selection is where gender becomes *manifest*, we have no *a priori* reason to believe it is where it is most important, or a centre of the whole gender system. The opposite may be the case, i.e. that gender is in fact far more important when not made explicit, as a latent aspect of relationships.

As the following discussion will make clear, I partially agree with this point of view, in the sense that gender often is of major importance precisely as a background relationship. Yet as a methodological approach, this easily means turning from a practice-oriented position towards a more essentialist one. How do we tell if gender is important or not? And, especially, how do *we*, as social researchers, legitimise a view that gender is important in social contexts where the participants themselves do not agree? Instead of assuming the universal importance of gender, as is a tendency within some gender studies today, we shall have to start, one way or the other, with its *perceived* and *manifestly expressed* importance. This is so even if the further focus of inquiry is its latent aspects, since these also will have to be compared to gender as actually manifested. The overall approach, therefore, must be one of starting with the more overt or commonly agreed-upon phenomena, moving into their background, trying to make sense of both. Later, we shall see that the 'landscape' or analytical

space does indeed change considerably when moving from the topic of gender relations to that of patriarchal organisation.

### (3) The reality of a non-monetary market

In *The Gender Market*, the following criteria were constructed for distinguishing "exchange" as a specific kind of transfer, as a sub-category distinct from interchange or transfer as such.<sup>20</sup>

Firstly, the existence of unevenness, different kinds of exchange, monopoly situations, etc. was briefly outlined, with the argument that 'exchange' must be seen as a common element in these.

Secondly, exchange requires a social process that can be defined in terms of time and space, with some pattern of institutionalisation or a main arena for the activities related to exchange.

Thirdly, it is required that this class of transfer is relatively homogenous ('likeartet'), with parallel relations (here the Sartrean concept of 'seriality' was used).

Fourthly, the relations must be characterised by substitutability, "so that each position is part of a kind of inner series. The exchange involves the substitutability of the partner, that this person may substitute me for another, or that an object cannot only be interchanged with a specific other object.

Further, the process outlined cannot be overshadowed or dominated by other processes so that the latter frames or determines the former. The activities of the interchange cannot, for example, be dominated by immediate disposal or appropriation or of common labour; the use of the objects must in principle exist outside the interchange.

Here I have defined the category of exchange more strictly than commonly done, (...) as serieses of similar and substitutable exchanges that dominate an activity arena, involving exchange-rational action and the participants' recognition of each other as commodity owners. (..) The market transcends more diffuse control of interchange; it puts any commodity under the full control of the commodity owner and no others. (...) I have already argued that all power represents a limitation of common movement or mutual subjectivity, and that the labour category itself implies a step in this direction. But isolated individuals are not the same as individuals dependent on their labour products' behaviour on the market and *dominated* by the latter." (Holter 1980a:17-18).<sup>21</sup>

During the fifteen years since the publication of this thesis, I have found no reason to revise my opinion of the reality of the gender market. The gender market is certainly often mythical, virtual or symbolic in its expressions, yet its societal reality is no less well-founded than that of the wage labour market. Succeeding in the gender market is no less important for individual survival, indeed, 'ruin' in this area may be even more closely connected to various negative social statistics than ruin in other markets.

### (4) The existence of non-market patterns in partner selection

Although gender market patterns have developed further and become more widespread and common in a country like Norway during the last fifteen years, they are not the only ones, and I have never argued that they are the only kind of reciprocity logic that is operative in partner selection. Friendship and gift relations were described in the *Gender Market* text, and acknowledged as qualitatively different, even if often peripheral compared to the exchange.

Operationalising market and non-market patterns is not always easy, not just due to the informal character of the interaction, the need for in-depth qualitative study, and the fact that a non-monetary exchange will necessarily remain comparatively diffuse. There is also, paradoxically, a contrary problem – concerning the fairly overt and manifest character of attractiveness rules, vis-à-vis *other* kinds of rules and patterns. We may find, for example, that parental effects are much less well-documented than attractiveness effects, yet measuring the former is a more complicated affair (as soon as we go beyond a simplistic theory of people looking directly for parental images). 'Spill-over' *versus* other effects transmitted from jobs to family life (like 'partial reversion', etc.: Holter 1990c) is a similar case. A shortcoming of the gender market study, related to this problem, is the lack of analysis of the very common phrase used by women especially, to the effect that one had to "consider '*the type*', the type of man. This type referred to social class position as well as attractiveness, but it did not stop there; it was a more qualitative designation. In defence it might be said that studies of men, not to speak of *masculinities*, were scarcely thought of when the thesis was written; today, it seems obvious that this category is involved, and that gender market theory should be developed and nuanced in terms of the *different* masculinities and femininities and the different kinds of market relationships between them. Pierre Bourdieu's (1984, 1991) theory of the habitus is also relevant here.<sup>22</sup>

#### (5) Do gender market relations influence later relationships?

According to gender market theory, the family sphere is primarily characterised by the activities stipulated in the informal gender market contract. The asymmetry and the commerciality of the initial meeting thereby influence couples' later interaction, much in the same way that other contract stipulations influence what later happens in the relationship defined by the contract.

In the gender market perspective, therefore, we would expect that couples' chances of long-term survival would be influenced mainly by two factors. One is the degree of male/female asymmetry or male dominance, which in Scandinavia as elsewhere has been shown to be counter-productive to marital and couple survival and well-being (Moxnes, K 1981, 1989). Another, less well studied area, concerns the degree of exchange-related alienation in the selection and formation process. Some material in this area is discussed later. We may also perhaps evaluate *exits* from couple relationships in this perspective, notably the hard-edged exchange attitude displayed by many divorcing couples. Whatever the case, the divorce area remains a bit hard to interpret from the 'gender as gift' perspective. We have a paradoxical situation in which family studies focus on giving and sharing, while entrance and exit studies show something rather more exchange-like. It seems obvious that these shifts are at least partially influenced by 'situational ideology' – they co-exist throughout, but are variously shifted to the foreground and background. In the next chapter, I examine this interrelationship more closely.

## (6) The significance of gender market theory for understanding current family sphere conflicts

As shown, the gender market theory includes views that are easily perceived as threatening, problematic, or better left alone. I do not imply that such reactions make these views 'right' in any sense. Yet they indicate, I believe, that what is touched upon, in the direction of commodity logic, alienation and reification right in the middle of private life, is a real problem. And when the very connection is denied, the problem does not quite go away for that reason; what is repressed may even strike back with a vengeance.

Why is it that the family sphere, more 'equal' than ever, is also so often experienced in terms of personal crisis? This is a relevant question. Why is it that a greater degree of equal status between men and women has *not* been accompanied by greater well-being? Why do we, instead, see many tendencies towards increased social and psychological 'costs' connected to 'normal' family life?

"The family no longer is a safe haven from a heartless world; it is instead itself increasingly an object of market forces", John Gillis (1995:26) argues. Yet *silence* has characterised this area in a country like Norway. What happens when themes like commodification, alienation and reification, those highlighted by the gender market theory, are left out of the family, gender and equal status discussion? Somehow conflicts and energies find an outlet. What remains, then, is 'equality' – more or less of it. A denial of the commodity-related problems of gender thereby easily creates a basis for the mistaken idea that *women are to blame*. It is the 'liberation' of women that has created the present family crisis.

This is the real 'cost', or boomerang effect, of the 'use-value-only', 'do not-mention-capital' kind of approach to gender that has increasingly characterised women's studies and gender studies in Norway.

In the gender market, anything is allowed. "All is fair in love and war." And so love itself may turn into war. Any program for *change* of the current partner selection and family formation practices, starting with combating the most short-sighted egotistical and exploitative attitudes that ruin the personal lives of many, must be based not on the constriction of choice, but on creating a greater social and personal awareness connected to this choice. It cannot lead *back* from the 'free exchange' stage to the 'patriarchal property' kind of stage, under the banner of returning to *family values*. This kind of property was exactly what created the exchange in the first place. In order to go forward, however, it is necessary to address the commodity connections of the gender system fully and openly, and not deny their existence.

## Conclusion

I end this chapter – and, thereby, the section on the gender market – by turning back to Anja, interviewed in the gender market study, who was quoted earlier:

"If he asks, you should be able to answer. You should always be able to answer and not be without your opinions".



Anja literally says a girl should not be "empty of meanings" ('tom for meninger'), void of meaning as defined by a *him*. This abstract male, who can confer value, attractiveness, appears in the singular, qualitatively, as a matter of 'taste', a 'type of man', a type of manly position. This *he* becomes the locus of the interaction; Anja partially takes his view: she *sees the equivalent* as defined by the relative, male position, and so describes herself from the outside; 'you do this, you do that'. Otherwise I am not sure if she can perceive or conceive of it. If women often mediate men's other-relationships, what appears here is men mediating women's self-relationships.

Is this an individual option? Are there individual ways out of it? The commercial partner selection relationships *locate* the persons to occupy certain positions of gendered attraction and attractiveness, and *furnish* these individuals with means to overcome some of the anxiety and alienation involved, yet they do not *define* or create the positions themselves, what is *gender-attractive* and what is not.

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<sup>1</sup> Adrienne Rich quoted by Sacks, K 1979.

<sup>2</sup> Despite increased equality, we still meet subdued versions of the 1950s pattern discussed by D. H. J. Morgan (in Anderson 1980:338) in which "the husband's project is realised with the aid of and through the wife; the wife's project is defined in terms of her husband." The man's side corresponds to what I called 'strong structuring' in the *Somebody for me* contact letter textual analysis (chap. 2).

<sup>3</sup> In Norway, the words for employer and employed imply that the first 'gives' work, the other 'takes' it. The market surface gives the impression that value stems from capital, not labour; that it flows from the rich world to the poor world – etc.

<sup>4</sup> This means that I disagree with a common perception for example in Norwegian women's studies to the effect that the social character of gender is now more or less established. To my mind, it is 95 percent non-established, 5 percent established. The common explanation principle, A explains B, is not much in evidence in this area; what one often finds instead is B explaining B. An example: "On the individual level, *gender* is created through the processes that form individual identity based on [med utgangspunkt i] *gender* symbolisation and *gender* division of labour. Structural *gender* is created on the basis of the ways in which we structure and organise our social activities on the background of *gender* metaphors. Symbolic *gender* (..) is created as a consequence of how dualistic *gender* metaphors are used" (Karin Widerberg referring Sandra Harding in Taksdal & Widerberg 1992:295, my trans. and emphasis).

<sup>5</sup> The time use and other statistics I have available do not allow a precise measurement of this proportion; perhaps five to ten percent of the total segregation of men's and women's activities can be seen as 'necessary' in terms of biological difference.

<sup>6</sup> The recent history of the nuclear family was described in these words by C.C. Harris (in Anderson 1980:408-9) in the late 1970s: "The history of the [modern] family is in part the history of the attempt by the dominant class to impose, through the state, bourgeois family forms on the proletariat, an attempt which only became successful with the rise of real wages. (..) The bourgeois family is rooted in private property, not in the trivial sense of being a means of the transmission of property, but in the sense of being an expression of the division of labour (..) Hence, under the conditions of a high degree of individuation characteristic of capitalism, the parents seek to reproduce not their society or their house/line/family but *themselves through* their children." If we disregard the neo-Marxist terminology, it remains a fact that nuclear family patterns were mainly introduced through a top-down process from the urban upper middle class downwards, and Harris's points regarding activity division, individuation and generational transfer are also broadly confirmed by the evidence.



<sup>7</sup> If we do not understand commodities, we are nevertheless part of a commodity society, and our failures in this regard will reappear when we try to conceptualise something "other", like gifts, as is discussed later (esp. chapter 7).

<sup>8</sup> Another objection is that the idea of a '*relationship between producer and reproducer*' as expressed in a '*code of gender*' only postpones the problem of gender, and raises the question of why people are dividable into these two activity categories in the first place. That is not, I believe, a true objection; it would be true only if 'analysis' meant answering all questions at once. The sphere division is an approximation, and it does represent a substantial step out of the gender circle. – It should be emphasised that the current view is *not* one of activities as basis, gender as superstructure. The gender code is not only 'cultural' in this sense; my main point concerns its non-monetary *economic* character.

<sup>9</sup> "A relational perspective", Karin Widerberg (in Taksdal & Widerberg 1992:289) argues, "means seeing *gender as a result*.(..) It is the relation or the relations that 'engender'." Widerberg goes on to discuss Dorothy Smith's (1990) work as example of this tendency to see gender as an effect. Yet in Smith's work the existence of gender as *cause* is very clearly the main issue, and so I think the example is misplaced (cf. chap. 10).

<sup>10</sup> This archaising tendency is discussed in chapter 8, where it is connected to current turbulence. As Lars Jalmert has remarked regarding 'archetype' portraits of gender in popular literature, one takes what fits, for example from Jung, like the notions of the archaic and ordered, while other parts of his ideas, like his notions of the feminine and masculine as rather fleeting components of any personality, are left alone (Lars Jalmert: paper presented on the men's studies conference in Karlstad, Oct. 1995, in print).

<sup>11</sup> One may even say quite the contrary, for the present model allows us to explain why this activity has been defined in terms of passive being (as in Norwegian, where domestic work has been termed 'home-being', '*hjemmeværende*').

<sup>12</sup> As is further discussed later, the value *form* arguments do not rely on a specific, narrow *quantitative* version of labour value theory. So we may say that the social position, or worth in a broader sense, is what is expressed in the equivalent.

<sup>13</sup> This is often reflected in feminist theory where gender is made into an *a priori* of the social subject; one 'knows' that people are gendered before they become social subjects (and that class, etc., are secondary matters). This is also reflected in parts of psychodynamic theory, going into women's traditional sphere and expressing equivalent position epistemology. One might put the view of the penis/phallus as basis of the symbolic in this category: by 'penetration', the term commonly used here, social contact is conferred on the woman. First, there is the unity with the mother, then the penis creates the symbolic world. Julie Kristeva (1987:198) writes: "The analytic situation indeed shows that it is the penis which, becoming the major referent in this operation of separation, gives full meaning to the *lack* or the *desire* which constitutes the subject during his or hers insertion into the order of language. (..) This operation constitutive of the symbolic and the social (..) the break indispensable to the advent of the symbolic." – Things look different from the other side, where we meet a host of traditions clustering around *money* as the basis of the symbolic order. *A social bond which is perceived as money-like from one point of view, becomes penis-like from the other.* The two develop on one and the same time horizon, creating its endpoints: the first is modernised, and attributed to adults, while the second is archaised and attributed to children.

<sup>14</sup> Confer Holter 1989a, where I describe the 'the closer to home, the greater the perceived equality' tendency.

<sup>15</sup> In my terms, this is the world's commodity existence. I disagree with the implication that women are simply a class of commodities (cf. femininity as medium between 'owner' and 'owned', discussed in chapter 8).

<sup>16</sup> A saying attributed to Catherine Hepburn. The first part of Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* describes a feminine subjectivity delineated by the beauty object, and I think it is the way in which this position is transcended, so to speak from the inside, that makes the portrait so powerful.

<sup>17</sup> This is further discussed as part of the gendered aspects of economic relations, at the end of chapter 13.

<sup>18</sup> Also, the historical role of the beauty object is easily obscured by dissolving it into 'traits'. In the gender market study, this role was discussed in relation to Foucault's notion of the 'hysterisation' of the female body. It is further discussed in terms of real subsumption in Holter 1982b.

<sup>19</sup> It should be emphasised that the gender market theory received much attention and support, more so than usual for sociological works. Whatever their further views, many people felt that the subject itself was important. Further, some main objections to my treatment of it were quite valid, as is discussed various other places in this text, relating mainly to a too narrow commodity focus and a somewhat 'dystopic' portrait.

<sup>20</sup> 'Interchange' = Norwegian 'utveksling'. – I want to acknowledge the contribution of Fredrik Engelstad regarding exchange criteria, and in general regarding the institutional emphasis in the gender market study.

<sup>21</sup> Labour was defined as a combination of activity involving human subjectivity, i.e. subjectivation, and activity creating objective results, objectivation (op.cit.13). "The value category must be connected to the totality of these [two] – the machine changes, objectivates, but it does not subjectivate, does not create new value." (ibid.). This was according to conventional labour value theory; constant capital transfers existing value, but it does not add anything. Yet if the closeness towards subjectivation determines the value magnitude added, may not the orientation of labour itself, towards non-human objects versus the human subject, influence it also? This was not directly addressed in the context, instead I argued that subjectivation as a process is independent of the form of subjectivity, its rational or irrational character, or its degree of inner- versus outer-directedness (op.cit. 13).

<sup>22</sup> In his *Childhood*, Jan Myrdal (1982:88, my trans.) wrote on parental images: "There are certain women that I react to as soon as I see them. And I get them in view at once, whether at a meeting or in a party, as soon as I get into the room. They have a certain way, a certain stance, move somewhat differently from others and have a particular resonance (timbre) in their voice. (...) It is not even falling in love. It is only that I know that these are women I could have lived with." Myrdal finds that these women have very little in common with his mother (Alva Myrdal), rather unsurprisingly, since he experienced his mother as a cold and distant person. His mother was blond and had a shrill, high voice. These women, and the women he actually did marry, were all dark and had mellow voices. They might, he reflects, resemble his father's mother, who cared warmly for him in childhood; yet he was twelve before this image of the wish woman was formed. "What I respond to are traits that I determined – or was determined for – by novels and serials and paintings when I was twelve years old and later." It was not, he thinks, his grandmother who formed this wish image. "But whom and what – that I do not know. Behind that door I see nothing."

## Chapter 5 Works and families

The ancient writer Hesiod wrote a text called *Works and Days*. In the text, family practices appear in a household setting as a matter of observing certain 'sacralities'. Even in a modern setting, the family has a certain sacrality, indeed, it is a common view that while the rest of the world has none, the family still has. Yet Hesiod's perspective was in a way quite the opposite of the modern one: while our world is

work-like, with households in the periphery of jobs, his was household-like, with works and days regulated in terms of the agricultural household calendar. Sometimes, however, the modern pattern appears like a surface, hiding quite a different arrangement (Holter 1995a).

## Introduction

There are many kinds of work, and many kinds of families. Over the last decades, the monolithic concept of the family has increasingly seemed out of touch with real-life family changes, and has been criticised by many; instead of a family life that could passably be theorised as striving after one ideal model, there are different kinds of families, and so 'the' family itself is increasingly described in the plural.<sup>1</sup>

This variation is important also for theories of gender. What has presented so far has been remarkably uniform, with the emphasis on common ground rules and behind-scenes relationships. As we saw, even 'variation' and 'difference' itself take on a new slightly greenish colour in the x-ray-like light of gender market analysis. At that wavelength, individuals become carriers of their gender, and the analysis lays bare some of its social anatomy, including the crossover abstract identification brought about by exchange, where the sensuous materiality of the one expresses the otherwise hidden social character of the other. This has been discussed in the previous chapters. Now, however, a certain methodological peculiarity appears.

In the market context, attractiveness starts out with little or no individuality, yet if it remains without it, it quickly fades from view. The market *creates* individuation due to its one-to-one dyadic layer of exchange, which all other exchange patterns have to pass through, or conform to. Two utter stereotypes would yet create one unique relationship, according to this logic – a logic not only of dyadic individuation, one to one, but also of singularity, *only* one, and tendentially everything through this relationship to the one.

The transfer mechanism, like exchange, is not everything and does not determine everything. Yet it does play a role. In view of the idea that gender, since it is so personal, is not economic, we may consider what would have happened to social class if it had been maintained through the same kind of transfer. The other person, then, would have embodied not just one specific class, but the whole agenda of class. Instead of public and political institutions, collective bargaining and macro-social conflict, the social character of class would be validated only by the one single other person in front of each of us. Class would not turn up by itself; it would not be formalised and socially visible, except as some shadowy aspect of the other person. If we imagine the rich panorama of cultural and mythic traits that would have been created, in the search for answers to major societal contradictions beyond this person-to-person engagement, we are perhaps not so far from the terrain of *gender* in contemporary society.

I think this is a useful example of a reciprocity 'thought experiment' for understanding what is involved on the reciprocity dimension, and how most things *change* as we move along it. The fact that gender seems to be about culture, more than economy, does not tell us too much. That would have been the case with social class also, had it

been organised in the same manner. The experiment brings out a main feature of the social forms approach: institutional patterns like gender and class are never just there, as static entities, but are instead formed by the changing reciprocity context of which they are part.

The limits of gender market theory now also increasingly emerge. The individuation and search for uniqueness in partner selection cannot only be classified as a means to enhance attractiveness or decode it into a dyadic personal dimension; these are ends also. Some traits in this direction have been mentioned already, like the emphasis on "the type of partner", and especially women's views of the type of man, leading into a more varied terrain of family sphere arrangements, different cultural traits, tastes, interests, friendships etc. As such traits come to the forefront, the exchange itself seems to shift stance; we are no longer faced with a relatively homogenous market, but rather a system of emerging gift-like patterns. This occurs through a kind of squeeze, the one-to-one singular relationship, which has the fatal property, one might say, of *also* being the elementary commodity relation, or 'instantly' being able to accommodate and effectuate such an interpretation as well as a gift interpretation.

As these one-to-one couple relationships solidify, they also display redistributive patterns, or sharing arrangements, creating what family sociology has called 'a third instance', with the dyad members acting not just for their own reasons, whether gift- or exchange-related, but also for the perceived common good. Thereby, the aforementioned 'sharing' reasons for being together become more important, while 'connection' reasons are no longer as clearly involved.

What appears, then, is a terrain that itself seems to impose certain views and methodologies on the researcher. While partner selection research encourages structural views, there is now a shift into a more individualising field. While societal structures and individual actors obviously exist in both areas, there is nevertheless a change of emphasis from the structure to the individual.

Three studies are selected as cases in the present discussion. They concern family formation and family adaptation, and they focus on families not in isolation, but as part of a wider setting, emphasising the work life framework. The first is a study of North Sea oil commuters, their work places and their families. The second is a study of employees in the ARFA engineering company and their families. The third is a recent survey on gender equality and family arrangements.

## The work life context

The family and work life research described in this chapter was conducted in a specific context. This was The Work Research Institute (WRI) in Oslo, a part of the international 'quality of work life' research tradition.<sup>2</sup> The WRI was founded on the broadly social democratic principle that while there may be many kinds of conflict between profit and capital interests on the one hand and work democracy and employees' well-being on the other, the relationship is not, or need not be, antagonistic. Social research was created within the consequent framework emphasising democracy, participation and application of results. This was combined with ideas that work organisation developments are important for societal

developments as a whole, that work conditions in mixed-economy capitalism could be changed to the better, and that this could be achieved primarily by shop floor action and reforms from the bottom of the hierarchy upwards (or also by intervention on other levels). Throughout, there was a main emphasis on participative democracy (Thorsrud & Emery 1969; Emery and Thorsrud 1976; Herbst, P 1970, 1976), plus a dose of the corporativism that has characterised social democracy in Norway perhaps even more than in other European contexts (Borchgrevink & Holter 1995:2pp.; Hernes, H 1987). This was an interdisciplinary tradition, with the goal of combining the broadest range of methods available, emphasising the qualitative angle in an *action research* perspective. Here, the researchers were conceived as agents in an interactive process which itself was part of the object of study, and besides combining the research and change goals, this approach, it was felt, would render better data than traditional detached quantitative methods.

In the early 1980s, feminist questions were emerging on the agenda here at the WRI as elsewhere, partly due to a new generation of researchers, and partly due to an increased general interest concerning 'indirect' work life patterning, represented by institutions like the family, the school and those of the local community. The result, through the 1980s and later, was a number of studies in two main areas especially – gender aspects of wage work organisations, and the interconnections of family life and work life.<sup>3</sup>

The three case studies, and the two first in particular, were fairly large projects covering many issues not discussed presently. Together with a parallel study of sailors and their families, the oil commuter study probably is the most detailed research ever done on commuting in Scandinavia. The ARFA study was part of a larger Nordic project on 'intimate couples' with special focus on the work life connection; no fewer than six sub-projects came out of this effort. I shall not, of course, attempt to present all of this; instead, some main traits that pertain to the current context of discussion are discussed. How do the studies nuance and extend the view of gender presented in previous chapters? What do they tell, especially, of non-commodity patterns, focusing on gift relations in the family sphere? The third study is included also for additional reasons, since it highlights some of the changes in the 'gender equality' terrain over the last fifteen years.

## Connecting spheres: North Sea commuter families

While the gender market study was characterised by a young urban (Oslo) sample, the participants in the North sea offshore commuter study were primarily recruited from a rural community on the southwestern coast of Norway (Solheim, Heen & Holter 1986). Forty married couples participated, almost all with the husband in the commuter role and the wife either as home worker or also as partly or fully employed onshore. The study was done in tandem with a similar study of sailors' and ship officers' families, partly from the same rural locality (Borchgrevink & Melhuus 1985).

The oil industry that developed in Norway after oil was found in the Norwegian sector of the North Sea in 1969, has some indirect connections to the gender market context presented earlier, in the broad sense of 'market forces' perceived as a threat to traditional family values. As the large scale of potential wealth from the oil resources was realised, the changes that the oil industry would create in the Norwegian social

structure and culture became a topic of public debate. Ecologists as well as cultural conservatives were sceptical to oil industry development. A coalition mainly consisting of the political left, the primary sector, and lay Christian traditions had succeeded in keeping Norway out of the European Common Market in 1972, partly due to emphasising its commercial aspects; it was seen as a modern version of 'Mammon' in some Christian camps. The commercialism of the oil industry was therefore also regarded with scepticism, not least in family value terms; there was the fear that a commuter-based offshore industry would create unstable conditions with more divorces and broken homes. Before the development of the oil industry in the 1970s, the southwestern rural part of the country had been characterised by a traditional family pattern with a low divorce rate, which was linked both to the lay Christian traditions mentioned, and to a high degree of male/female work segregation.

This context and contemporary concerns were reformulated on a feminist and work research basis by the research team. Would the commuting arrangement increase the isolation and oppression of women in the homes? On a more general level, of main importance in work life research terms, would not this commuting situation bring out, once and for all, the existence of the home *as a work organisation*? This question was relevant both in the wider debate at the time and in the WRI context, where 'work' almost exclusively had meant wage work. It is noteworthy that the gradually perceived problems with the narrow 'work equals paid work' view did not only arise from the public debate or from feminist pressure. They also appeared in work life research itself, where family matters (as well as gender matters in the workplace) emerged as matters of consequence in many concrete contexts.

The studies did in fact give a much broader and deeper portrait of work outside a company framework than what had been usual in the quality of work life research tradition, and they also brought out more of the importance of domestic behind-the-scenes activities for wage work conditions. For example, the oil commuter study showed that two such 'outside' traits were central for the commuting employee, namely the ability to create at least a minimal balance between work and family demands, and – as a related phenomenon – the partner's or spouse's support. If the latter wanted the employee out of the commuting, chances were good that he would quit. Further, the success or failure of the work environment itself, in this 'home perspective', in many senses emerged as a consequence of household and family adaptation, even if the physical work environment and the homes were miles away from each other and separate also in socioeconomic terms.

In these studies, the workers no longer appeared only as individual workers. They did not speak only in individual terms. Rather than their family appearing as part of their job project, their job project often, especially among working class employees, emerged as part of their family project. In the commuter studies and in other studies we found a remarkably consistent 'subdued phenomenology' surrounding this major issue. For example, the men working offshore often had a running 'inner dialogue' with their wives or partners, sometimes to the extent that the physical absence only served to enhance the psychological presence. Some interesting traits regarding the *sphere relationship* were often brought more clearly to the surface in 'unusual' circumstances like long-term commuting.

The research team combined anthropological field work methods with observation and interview methods in the more traditional sociological sense, and included the oil installations and the local community as well as the households in the study. We soon discovered a rural family and gender reality that was often quite different from the urban 'equality agenda', where greater gender segregation did not necessarily mean greater subordination. On the contrary, women in the southwestern coastal region had a tradition of partial economic independence, managing the small farm on their own while their husbands were away through employment either in the merchant fleet, or more recently in the offshore oil industry.

One major finding from the study, rather surprising in terms of the debate about family absence at the time, consisted in the fact that in this rural context especially, the husband's *presence* in the household was in some ways more problematical for the wife than his absence from it. The problems were due to several factors. There was the men's daily life socialisation in an almost purely male work environment offshore; the structuring of the onshore period as 'free time' for the man – but not for his wife; the man's tendency to 'time bind' his wife by imposing his time schedule on hers; his problems with her running the household, while his own position was peripheral; her problems with his demanding presence, and other traits.

In general, we found that the domestic contribution of the spouses of the commuters was of main importance for the commuter's own performance and stability in the job. The commuter studies confirmed the hypothesis that domestic and reproduction sphere work is a main part of the background of 'manifest' production sphere results. As argued, this wider background connection is only partially evident in work contexts themselves, yet the 'unusual' arrangement of commuting made it more evident than elsewhere (Finch, J 1983). What appeared, then, was not only a main connection between the job and the home, but also a kind of 'wage work version' of this axis on the offshore installations themselves, with segregation as well as a hierarchy between production-oriented and reproduction-oriented tasks of which more will be said later (chapter 13). If my idea of a main division between productive and reproductive roles had been somewhat academic when I wrote *The Gender Market*, it was confirmed in close-up studies of work organisations like the ones mentioned here.

The sphere relationship and the production/reproduction division emerged as 'lived reality' in many areas and on many levels, usually in the direction of a 'gendered' reality, or even a core of gender relations, as hypothesised. So, for example, the problematical character of the husband's presence at home could often be interpreted as a fairly direct pointer to the problematical position of production sphere work vis-à-vis reproduction sphere work. Many men, and those in superior positions especially, tended to internalise work place norms. If they had administrative tasks in their jobs, they often tended to administrate the home also; if they spent much of their working time waiting, as many did, for some other part of the organisation to do its job, they also often seemed to follow the same pattern at home, waiting for their wives' services. In this and other studies, work place 'spillover' emerged as a main normative adaptation effect (Holter 1990c). The oil companies often interviewed potential recruits about their family relationships with a view to their future job stability, yet many felt that they did not care much for the homes and families afterwards. What was required was the contribution of a *couple*, not just an *individual*, though disguised as the *manifest* support of the one, and the *latent* or hidden contribution of the other.



These and similar empirical findings from a variety of family and work place circumstances, including studies of journalists, teachers and other groups not mentioned here, were of major importance for the wider view of the gender system and its patriarchal aspects that I developed in my own 1980s theoretical work. If the gender market study showed a 'front entrance' to family life that might lead to exploitation within it, these studies showed the existence of asymmetrical, daily-life patterns that often seemed to qualify for the term 'exploitation' (*'utnytting'*) in the wide sense. All along the line, the manifest production-oriented contributions were compensated, while the more latent reproduction-oriented contributions were not, or not to the same degree.

In the spirit of the gender and women's studies at the time (the early 1980s), the emphasis in the commuter study was on the 'work' aspect of family life and reproduction, including a very detailed structured questionnaire about domestic tasks, almost down to the level of 'who brushes the teeth of whom'. As I said, a main goal was to establish *the household* as a work place on its own, and help pave the way for a better understanding of the household organisation's own dynamics and adaptation to the surrounding community and to the sphere of wage work. This emphasis was understandable in circumstances where the existence of a shadowy 'sphere of reproduction' had only recently emerged on the agenda, especially through time use studies.

Like other studies, the commuter projects showed the importance of the production/reproduction dimension not only as a division between jobs and homes, but also a fine-masked system of segregation within each sphere. Therefore I became more convinced that feminist and equal status perspectives must focus not only on the form of *compensation*, but also, and I think primarily, on this deeper-level *activity orientation* itself. Yet at that level one must be very careful not to confuse segregation with stratification. In fact, the 'segregation is bad' line of thought was, with some right, considered as a direct attack on the interests of many women in the rural context described.

## A marriage typology

While starting with households in a very practical and task-oriented sense of that word, it soon became clear that households were also 'homes', as a category signifying quite a bit more than the right balance of benefits and burdens. An important part of the research process in the commuter study case consisted of a gradual reemergence of family patterns as important on their own, vis-à-vis the household and task organisation level of analysis. This is of interest in terms of family research especially, since it did not imply going back to a more traditional position where families are seen only as sociopsychological entities, constructions of reality, psychological systems, etc., with little regard for the work that actually goes on there. Rather, it was a step forward; the two areas must be studied in combination.

For many reasons, including the ambiguous character of segregation mentioned, we were not satisfied with a common typology in this field, where families are described as 'modern' or 'traditional'. Instead, faced with a rather wide field of 'family variation' in the material, the research team attempted a development of a theoretical typology



of marriages that was connected, among other things, to the gender market contexts described earlier.

We started by creating a marriage scale according to what I called *marriage contractuality*. The contractuality is high if the *contract* element of the marriage is continuously *actualised* or made relevant – for example by the possibility of one of the spouses leaving being brought into discussions. Marriages at the top of the scale remain contract-like or contractual, while those at the bottom instead are conceived as a lifelong indissoluble '*bond*'. The latter may seem a somewhat quaint notion in a contemporary perspective, with marriages generally moving towards the contractual end of the scale, yet it was still quite relevant in the context of the study. There is also something to be said for a view that things are more subtle in this area; in some senses, these two definitions are interdependent (cf. the anti-market norms created by the gender market itself, discussed earlier).

We did not quite manage to agree on a further development of this typology, and the four main types described below represent my own interpretation. In retrospect it seems clear that we struggled with problems that are typical in the family studies field, leading many researchers back to the division between traditional and non-traditional families even if there is probably a common agreement that this is a limiting and hazy distinction. One main idea with this approach, much in line with what has been said earlier regarding reciprocity, was that the logic and internal qualities and dynamics of couple relationships do indeed *differ*. In order to answer questions like 'what makes families work', one must first recognise that they work in qualitatively different *ways*; if not, family systems theory easily becomes one-dimensional and misleading (Holter 1995a).<sup>4</sup>

A definition of a solidarity basis of marriage, a 'solidarity-oriented' marriage type, was proposed and discussed in the project, with two main elements: common interests or communality as main goal of the relationship, and conscious, open negotiation and choice as the means to this end (Solheim, Heen & Holter 1986:2:116pp.). There is, therefore, a contractual element, but with this common interest rather than the individual interest focus. It is not so surprising, in retrospect, that we found (as I did in later studies) that such motivations are generally voiced throughout.<sup>5</sup> There is some truth to the solidarity category, I believe, even if most of it exists beneath the level of declared goals.

Another and more serious problem also emerged, even if it did not invalidate the type designation as such. What was found of couple solidarity in practical terms was often slanted in the man's favour. Solidarity here as elsewhere often meant masculine affinity and wage work orientation with the man's job in focus, although we also found some interesting and positive exceptions to this rule, where the solidarity had become a more balanced reality. Such cases may have become less exceptional, as is related later.

The solidarity-oriented type differed from a second 'exchange-oriented' type of marriage. This second type, like the first, was positioned towards the high end of the marriage contractuality scale, and often even further towards that end. Its main difference from the first type, however, concerned an emphasis on individual rather

than collective interests. This type, which in a rather narrow sense reflects the gender market context, is further discussed later.

A third type was defined as 'gift-oriented'. While the solidarity type was characterised by sharing and commonality of tasks, with task segregation as a subdued matter, the segregation was more manifest and systematic in this case. There was a sense of distance, and a main role of gifts was to bridge this gap, usually not in overt or explicit ways, but more as a silent message that the two sides did indeed fit together. Husband and wife were complementary, like Parsons' vision of the nuclear family. While negotiations were open and explicit in the two first types, they were indirect and subdued here, with the emphasis on harmony rather than being able to voice and solve conflicts through negotiations.

A fourth, 'duty-oriented' type was also identified, often linked to the gift type presented above, as a more negative version of it. An emphasis on duty, sacrifice and necessity was a common theme, especially among the wives. Here, the emphasis on a harmony rather than a negotiation model of family proceedings was even more marked than in the gift type, and there were also many other elements resembling the conventional picture of the traditional family.

The third and the fourth types were more prevalent in the rural than in the urban setting, more associated with the primary sector occupations than with an industrial setting, and positioned further towards the 'bond' end of the marriage contractuality scale than the first two types. We shall also see, however, that relations of gift-giving were important across this typology. In general, all the couples in the study (and in other studies) displayed some traits of all of the four types, yet with varying emphasis, so that most could be identified within the typology.

In some cases, we were able to identify 'positive and negative cycles' or development patterns in the marriages. This was especially the case with marriages belonging to the third and fourth types, often shifting between them, so that a 'duty' in a negative phase could become a 'gift' in a more positive context. Two traits appeared to be important for such more positive developments. The first was related to the *reality* of gift relations, of which more is said below, as well as a connected perception of a broad *balance* between husband and wife in gift terms. The other was an experience of exceptional circumstances, often a *crisis* in the couple, for example in relation to the illness of one spouse, that had been successfully solved. In these and other respects our findings fit Berger and Kellner's (1972) construction of reality perspective, for what was involved was also, on a deeper level, the establishment of the relationship *as* a reality.

## Marriages and the 'production' of gender

Sohn-Rethel argued that "in accordance with its basis in private property, and as a form of contact congruent with the rules of private property, commodity transfers are in each single case determined by the principle of the private opposition of reciprocal spheres of property. Mine – therefore not yours; yours – therefore not mine: this is the determining principle of the logic of the relationship. (..) Commodity transfer therefore is a form of interaction involving clearly separated property spheres." Sohn-

Rethel goes on the quote Taylor (from *Shop Management*, 1903) who wrote that his system was "built on precise studies of each single worker's consumption of time and movements, seen in isolation".<sup>6</sup>

If such a sphere-like isolated existence is of some relevance in the gender market, in the entrance to couple relationships, it must be transcended for the couple to become a reality. This is commonly done through a phase of increasingly wide and deferred gift relations, in a movement towards the establishment of a common sphere of sharing.

Such a sphere of sharing is a common goal and ideal of families, as a general element through various marriage or couple types, although differently emphasised and conceived. At the same time, several circumstances including the spouses' different job contexts, various forms of asymmetry between the spouses and segregation of domestic tasks make it difficult to realise this goal fully. In this perspective, giving may become a way to make up for the partial failure to realise the goal of sharing, sometimes in overt ways, with gifts used for conflict resolution or in order to redress hurt feelings.

As we have seen, the 'formal' or transfer-related character of the gender dyad may be interpreted and worked out in different ways. There may be more or less emphasis on exchanging, giving or sharing as a basic framework, leading into a more concrete type of marriage like the ones outlined above. At this point, a methodological principle is important. The marriage typology outlined is in a sense *superficial* compared to the preceding gender commodity analysis; it concerns features on the more concrete surface of the couple relationship.

In principle, a contract defining a relationship, established in a market-like setting, does *not* imply that the relationship itself is market-like. Contractuality at the entrance to a unit does not spell contractuality within it. What we would expect, instead, is that the stipulations involved in the contract, its formal and informal obligations, rights and duties, are of importance also in the subsequent relationship – whether in an exchange-like setting, or in some other form. According to critical economic theory, what is involved is a shift from the 'exchange' phase of the private property relationship to a next 'use' or 'activity' phase that may be characterised by different forms of relations, as long as the exchange stipulations are upheld. In the case of wage labour, the worker may be contracted in the most anarchistic fashion only to discover a quite contrary reality of authoritarian discipline in the next stage. Indeed, these two opposite extremes have often been known to go together. This does not imply that the first stage has no impact on the second; instead, as discussed previously, there is usually a turnaround of affairs, or at least a shift from the comparatively horizontal relations of the market to the more vertical relations in the activity organisation.

Instead of exchange-like family relations, therefore, the analysis leads us to expect a deeper-level *valorisation* pattern through different types of families and different forms of family-related activity. Exchange-like family relations may be interpreted as a more *overt* form of valorisation, but also, and in some contexts primarily, as a reaction against it, since keeping the exchange 'door' open is a way to avoid too vertical relations within the unit. "If you do so-and-so, I will leave you".

What does this valorisation pattern consist of? As in the case of exchange, I keep to standard traits generally emphasised in the critique of economy traditions. Valorisation is a process in the 'use' rather than the 'exchange' stage of the commodity; it follows the market deal where the means of a new activity process are contracted, and precedes the next market relations where the results of this process are realised. It concerns the abstract aspects of labour in the activity process itself. It is therefore a background process compared to the concrete tasks, one that influences the wider meanings of these tasks. Two traits are of main importance: a social or qualitative positioning of tasks and of their results, and a disciplinary regime concerned with the upkeep of this positioning. Although the character of these regimes may vary, one form of alienation is necessary throughout: the final results of the labour process must be exchangeable or otherwise transferable, in order to be realised as commodities.

I have already argued that valorisation in the family sphere can be approached in terms of the *genderisation* process; this is its 'local' form of appearance. My reasons for this assumption can only be presented through a broader discussion of the modern gender system, which is done in chapter 8 and subsequent chapters, and so it may be taken as a hypothesis in the present context. It meets the valorisation criteria just mentioned. Genderisation involves a qualitative positioning, a 'meaning background' of concrete tasks. It is indubitably connected to power and a disciplinary regime. Finally, it allows transfers out of the immediate process, or alienation in the basic sense outlined. This happens partly in the overt form of transfers of new labour power from the household to the labour market, and partly in less overt forms of transfer within the domestic sphere itself, including the distribution of reproducers through the gender market.

Although more will be said of this later on a more theoretical level, some main empirical observations are relevant here. In a recent Canadian interview study, Jenny Blain (1994) found four main discourses surrounding gender segregation of family work: personal preference, abilities of women versus men, roles and socialisation, and natural bonding of mother and child. This resembles the results from the Norwegian commuter studies and other research. One main feature of the segregation, whether at home or in the workplace, is, precisely, to *produce* gender in this more abstract sense. Tasks 'confer' and/or 'create' a wider sense of masculinity or femininity.<sup>7</sup> I am not implying that this background function is all there is to sex segregation, but it does emerge as one *main feature* across different concrete, cultural, national etc. contexts.

Another main trait may also be noted. There is a significant variation in the way in which housework and other tasks are linked to gender, which may be described as a scale from *direct/concrete* gender attachment to *indirect/abstract* attachment. At the concrete end of this scale, gender is created directly by specific activities, in a setting where some tasks are 'men's work' and others 'women's work'. In the commuter study this concrete segregation framework characterised most of the rural couples and the gift and duty types of marriage. Subsequent studies indicate that it is gradually being replaced by another setting where the division has been shifted towards a more abstract level. What matters in the abstract segregation framework is not whether the husband cleans the outside of the windows of the house, while the wife cleans the inside – as we found in one vivid case in the commuter study – but the overall relationship between production and reproduction orientation. Domestic tasks may now be shared or shifted from one to the other, so the man does not, for example, feel

that his masculinity becomes endangered by washing the floor. Yet the general orientations remain different, with the man using more of his time on production-related tasks, the woman more on reproduction-oriented tasks. The emphasis shifts from concrete tasks to larger responsibilities: he is the external resource supervisor, while she is the expert on human resources.

This variation may be interpreted in different ways. It may be seen as an index of the degree of 'capitalisation of reproduction', since the more abstract pattern is what might be expected if valorisation becomes more important. Yet this perspective rests on the dubious assumption that the concrete segregation framework and other traditional traits mean that these families ever existed outside of society, or were pre- or non-capitalist in this sense. This is an 'archaising' view that obscures the main empirical patterns. In our context, all the family types discussed above, including the rural ones, belong to one and the same nuclear family organisation, which is different from what existed earlier (also in the Norwegian context, as brought out by Eilert Sundt's (1967) 19th. century studies). It seems more probable, therefore, that it is the *type* of integration that is involved. This is discussed later in terms of a shift from 'masculinatic' to somewhat more 'androgynatic' conditions (chapters 8 and 12).

The 'production' of gender through these two main forms of task segregation in the domestic sphere does not imply that the integration should be seen as a direct link. Much will be said later regarding its contradictory, counterpoised character. In anticipation of this analysis, genderisation can be interpreted precisely as creating a *counterposition* vis-à-vis society and the economy at large. It does not make the household factory-like, but rather homelike; it helps create a 'sense of family' that differs from what goes on on the outside. Also, it may be noted that the present issue of 'production' of gender through domestic labour (or non-labour) illustrates the problem of method mentioned earlier, where I said that one cannot go directly to families for understanding gender, since what we see, then, is gendered families. Neither the entrance to the family sphere nor the activities within this sphere give a privileged or direct insight regarding the modern gender system. The method, therefore, is one of following the main practical paths or real-life processes connected to gender, and then turn towards an analysis of the system as a whole.

## Exploring gift reciprocity

As we saw, the reality of the couple relationship itself is involved in a shift from the commodity terrain of the gender market, towards a sphere of sharing. So whatever way it 'works', it has to *work out*, and there comes a point where commodity logic, now in the property or 'use' stage, does not work out. Marriage as construction of reality therefore also involves some forms of deconstruction of individualism, and it is not precisely news that men often have more problems in this regard than women. The activities of the family require a minimal sociopsychological basis, related to the character of the tasks, including care, emotional closeness, psychological and physiological regeneration and socialisation. The 'this-for-that' commodity rule, not to speak of the 'more, more' rule of the capital commodity, cannot furnish that basis. They become, instead, a wider background that the family is evaluated against: the more it departs from this background, or stands out as a figure in contrast to it, the more the household becomes a 'home'.

This is a main context for understanding the importance of gift and sharing relations in the family sphere, as well as many current problems within that sphere. In the commuter study, we noted the growth of more individualist and exchange-related patterns within some marriages (Solheim, Heen & Holter 1986:128pp.). Yet this was seldom stated in so many words. On the contrary, such tendencies were habitually interpreted within an already existing 'main configuration' dominated by gift giving and sharing, which in turn 'familiarises' the unit compared to society at large.

"We find that in the marriages characterised by a high degree of 'unequal exchange' in the husband's favour, the interaction usually takes the form of negative *gift* exchange, and not that of an 'open' market contract." (Op. cit. 132, my translation here and below).

The gift pattern, therefore, was often located somewhere between the zone of ideals and the real world:

"Gift exchange, as a basic pattern of marital interaction, is distinguished from the duty pattern [in marriages] by the fact that the gift is defined as personal and voluntarily chosen. Yet the gift also stands in sharp contrast to market exchange, by the fact that what is transferred is not split off as 'external' traits and objects with an independent value. The gift is an aspect of one's own *person*, sometimes even *the whole* person, like love. To give a gift is to give of oneself.

In many ways, *the personal gift* is the very ideal of marriage and cohabitation. At the same time, the logic of the gift is thin and vulnerable (...) The gift loses its value when it has to be asked for, when reduced to payment. The essential aspect of the gift is that it cannot be calculated, it has no price, but a *personal* quality" (ibid.).

Here and elsewhere in this study, the gift was defined in terms of a *commodity counterprinciple*: where the commodity is calculated, the gift is not; if the commodity is anonymous, the gift is personal; if the commodity is distasteful, the gift recreates taste. The implications of this view were not clearly brought out in the study. Also, the giving and receiving often emerged as a *surface level* of the interaction:

"The gift is something that either is given or not given. It cannot be partitioned into portions. Yet precisely because the personal gift escapes calculation and a formalisation of balance and equality, there exists the possibility of very inegalitarian situations under the surface of the gift." (Op.cit. 133).

The guilt feelings that characterised some marriages were connected not to exchange, rather than gift relations:

"The duty-related calculus concerning guilt and sacrifice is also, in a sense, alien to the language of gift exchange. Guilt is something that can constantly be partitioned and redistributed, and the question of the *amount* of guilt is usually of great relevancy. One pays off on guilt all the time, and it may be waived. The notion of guilt therefore lies closer to the logic of the market; guilt exists within the greater framework of a language of money, and constitutes a *secret connection between the freedoms of the market and the bonds of duty*." (Ibid., my emphasis). The last observation is perhaps especially pertinent in Norwegian culture, not least in the lay Christian, 'industrious'

marriage setting. This is not so far from Luther's ideal of marriage; there is God on the one hand, Mammon on the other, and guilt in between. In this sense, family sphere gifts may become personalised commodities, bereft of their overt (and more free, more sinful) market form. Yet the gift patterns cannot be reduced to this aspect. In this and other studies, gifts were also connected to another emotional dimension, one of worth or worthiness on the one hand, and shame on the other.

Men and women did not relate to the gift patterns in the same ways. "The women's 'gifts of care' are *tied* to the person, whereas most men do not contribute in the same manner (...) Men can give their gifts and disappear, while women in a quite different way 'remain' within their own gifts. This kind of inequality cannot be 'measured', yet it may be *experienced* as a qualitative difference. In the oil commuter marriage, where this inequality becomes especially manifest due to the absence of the husband, there may be large problems involved in keeping up the image that his and her contributions *really* are equal, just and personal gifts to the other. (..) Therefore, even the marriages that are based on an ideal of mutual gift giving and equality may easily find themselves in a perpetual tug of war about who has given the most" (ibid.).

In other words, not only is the gift somewhat ideal in the first place, and posited as a counterprinciple vis-à-vis the commodity, it also often slips back into a more commodity-like terrain. This portrait leads to the following conclusion:

*"The lacking gift from the man, which points back to the personal gift of the wife and reduces it to something of no consequence, something that can be taken for granted, in many ways is a common theme in many families. It is this form of 'imbalanced' gift transfer that represents the most usual form of inequality between the spouses."* (Op.cit. 140).

It seems clear – even more in retrospect than it did at the time – that this analysis, which I think represents the real situation fairly well, brings up a *dilemma*. On the one hand, there is the agreeable, yet diffuse terrain of gift-giving, with some inbuilt traps or catches due to the lack of equality. On the other hand, there is the disagreeable, yet clear-cut terrain of commodity-like accounting. This is not an especially academic issue: should we put the 'who does what' list on the wall, keep it in a drawer, updated for future dire possibilities, or just forget it?

The lacking gift from the husbands may also be interpreted as a 'reciprocity communications failure', or an opposition of two different reciprocity forms. The importance of money and the good wages that the men could bring home were usually implicit in the interviews and remain understated in the report from the study. There is little doubt that oil commuters, and especially the operators with steady employment, were attractive 'husband material'.<sup>8</sup> In some contexts, marrying the man was itself a boon for the woman, and this is probably one reason why complaints do not seem to have been followed up by divorce initiatives.

In their periods of absence from the home, many men at the offshore installations nevertheless were concerned about the faithfulness of their wives, which emerged as a somewhat mythic theme, fuelled by some of the public debate. They felt that the wives were free to do what they pleased, while they themselves were stuck on the platform. Many features of the informal organisation surrounding the commuting



could be interpreted as counter-checks against such possibilities. Informal discipline and overseeing were maintained among the women in the rural context especially (and in the more traditional setting of the seamen's wives even more than among the oil workers' wives), with rumour-making and other sanctions.

The closed offshore installation environment enhances redistributive and sharing aspects rather than exchange elements – to the extent that everyone at the platform, from platform chief to the lowest worker, may describe themselves as 'us', surrounded not only by stormy seas but also by a vaguely bureaucratic onshore 'them'. The safety routines and the dangers of living close to an oil extraction process enhanced these communal feelings (Hanssen-Bauer & Holter 1983). Instead of an exchange logic, therefore, a '*stability logic*' was the most noticeable consequence of the work for onshore family life. The affluent lifestyle allowed by oil wages most probably contributed to this relative family stability.

However, even if the family patterns connected to the oil industry did not develop as some skeptics had argued, what emerges today, also in the areas especially involved with the industry, is a family pattern that in most ways resembles the urban pattern ten or twenty years ago. Differences are no longer as great; the whole has been homogenised on urban terms. For many families, the commuting was experienced as a strain that was acceptable for a period, yet not for a whole working life. Many wives wanted their man out of the offshore work in the future, after a period of family formation and investment. The rising divorce rate in the southwestern region as well as elsewhere in Norway may reflect that the commuting strains became larger over time, as was the feeling of most of those we interviewed. This is unknown, since there has been no follow-up of the early 1980s study.

In the commuter case study, we were repeatedly told that one had to be of a particular sort in order to like this kind of life, or be able to adapt to it. In this context, the 'type' emerged in another and less mysterious light than it did in the gender market study. For example, it was clear that men and women with sea faring family backgrounds adapted more easily to North Sea commuting than others. For them, it was a great step forward, in terms of times, schedules and also often money; for land-based industry workers, on the other hand, it might represent a step backwards despite a higher wage.

The 'type', as we see, represents a certain kind of relationship, not just in personal terms, but in terms of a certain kind of job and a certain kind of balance and time schedule between the family and the job. It brings more concrete and individual considerations into gender market behaviour that partly offset more abstract attractiveness considerations. However, these are not individual in the sense of being removed from either domestic reproduction considerations or wage work production needs; rather they represent the variety of niches and adaptations that connect these two spheres.

The vulnerability of gift relations emerges as something of a paradox in view of the commuter study and other studies covering the same theme. In a sense it is precisely *because* these relations are vulnerable that they become important. They help create the home as a counter-reality to that of the workplace. The greater the pressure from the job, the greater the need to find some 'differential ground'.<sup>9</sup> In the commuter case, this process was enhanced also by the danger of offshore life and other elements



creating a need for stability. If the study had been focused on other aspects of family life rather than household work, the importance of giving and sharing relations would probably have been even more apparent. Nevertheless, the fact that these relations often become stretched or thin when practices are considered does say something of the family as a whole. In the wider theoretical perspective, the various marriage types and home/work adaptations are variants of one main institutional pattern. This is the 'nuclear' family framework where genderisation of activities goes together with two forms of burdens and benefits, two spheres of influence, usually with an overall imbalance in the woman's disfavour.

## Gender in a technology culture

The ARFA study, which as mentioned was part of a Nordic project on 'intimate couples' in the mid-1980s, throws further light on these issues. The study was mainly based on a questionnaire that was also used in some of the other Nordic sub-projects (my discussion is based on some common results as well as those specific of the ARFA case). The initiative to the project was originally based on an idea of studying 'what makes families work', instead of just what makes them break down, since the latter had been a main theme in the debate in the Nordic countries as elsewhere. As a member of the Nordic project group I contributed to shifting the focus in two more specific directions. The first was the connection of work life and family life, which was made into a topic of especially detailed inquiry in the ARFA study. The second was the connection between partner selection traits and subsequent characteristics of the relationship.

Most of the 52 couples in the study were in their early thirties, usually with the man employed in the ARFA company. This company, situated near Oslo, belonged to the upper echelons of Norwegian private sector work life with high wages and good but also demanding work conditions. Most of the men were engaged with technical planning tasks, mainly as engineers, while their spouses worked as nurses, secretaries, librarians, teachers and other occupations, usually somewhere further down in the occupational hierarchy compared to the man.

Although the study suffered from a too narrow questionnaire approach, a series of conferences with the participants was held also, and it did have the still fairly unique trait of collecting data dyad-wise – i.e. so that the spouses' questionnaire responses could be connected and compared. This is important since most official statistics and many studies portray gender relations disconnected from the dyadic context. By linking the answers from the spouses, we got an interesting picture of the dynamics of the couple otherwise not easily obtainable.<sup>10</sup>

ARFA was an advanced company in many respects, with a 'dynamic' rather than a 'static' work organisation; employees were shifted around according to current project needs, and project organisation principles dominated the work place. These principles may be summarised in the notion of the *competitive team* – a framework of partly individual, partly team-wise competition, paired with a team philosophy. The team element was important for solving complex tasks, yet wage levels were set individually and were seen as a very private affair – to the extent that it was said that the income-related questions in the questionnaire felt harder to answer than the sex-related questions.

In the family/work life tradition, much thought has gone into the character of the relationship between the home and the work place, mainly within a framework of asking which norms or personal traits are carried back home, or from home to work. This was followed up in the ARFA study, where three main connections were hypothesised: spillover from work to home, reversal, and more advanced or selective responses, involving 'second order learning' in Gregory Bateson's term. What we found, however, was mainly a spillover pattern, and a reciprocal effect connected to it, with traits at work and at home enhancing each other. Although some hesitancy is in order before interpreting this result, since the other patterns, and especially the more advanced or selective one, would not register as clearly in a survey, the qualitative parts of the study confirmed that spillover was the major trait. As in the oil commuter study, the relatively high wage level and privileged branch/sector position of the firm probably are part of its background.

The couple relationships, therefore, also had quite a few of the characteristics of a competitive team. Yet beneath this level of symmetrical negotiations, the relative burdens and benefits placed on husbands and wives, or cohabiting male and female partners, were very different. A detailed set of questions were formulated in order to bring the "*shadow work*" at home, behind the official work in the company, into light.

When asked about the consequences of their husbands' jobs in ARFA for their own life, 69 percent of the women said they had to postpone or limit their own career or employment; 59 percent said they had to give their husband encouragement and emotional support, and 76 percent said they had to spend much time alone as a consequence of his job. There were similar scores on items concerning social representability, taking responsibility for the children and the home, have a positive attitude to the partner's job, and similar. These and other traits of the answers read much like the recipe for the ideal US company wife of the 1950s – yet this was 'egalitarian Norway' in 1987.

The results are interesting in view of the argument that dynamic organisations work better for women than static organisations, which is sometimes presented in the Norwegian debate. This is primarily based on a more restricted proposal from Elin Kvande and Bente Rasmussen (1993), namely that dynamic organisations work better for women inside them. I think Kvande and Rasmussen have sometimes given a too optimistic picture of the female employees' chances, for example when they say that "the dynamic networks depend on everyone's contributions, making women as well as men visible as professionals" (op.cit. 54); such a dependency does not necessarily lead to rising status. In a company like ARFA, prestige-giving visibility was often slanted in men's favour and in favour of employees who kept a certain facade towards their superiors. Some have argued that dynamic organisations represent patriarchy's dissolution, which is not exactly what comes across from this study.

In general, the overall effect of different kinds of organisations for gender equality must be determined not just on the basis of what happens inside these organisations, but also their effect on their surroundings, including the home sphere. In the case of the ARFA study, the Nordic project framework did allow some comparison of this dynamic setting with other, more traditional or static organisations. The results indicate that the shadow workload – or 'wife burden' score – was distinctly lower among these, than in the ARFA case.

## Exchanging looks and status

The ARFA study also included fairly detailed partner selection and relationship questions. Only a minority knew each other well before starting their relationship, and a half did not know each other at all. External selection criteria were important for many, more than in the other, representative surveys, with the 'traditional' male/female emphasis on looks/status discussed earlier. The dyadic data confirmed the stereotype that 'good looks' and 'good wages' do indeed tend to select each other, including the fact that *his* view of *her* as sexually attractive did not correlate with a similar view from her side.

The participants were asked to rate their own looks and that of their partner. The common reality established by the couples in other respects failed at this point, especially regarding the body appearance of the man, where there was no correlation between the men's self-view and their partners' view. Further, I did not find a tendency that looks would balance each other, as perceived traits, as could be expected from the construction of reality perspective. There was no correlation between male and female partners' evaluation of their own appearance.

Among women, a positive perception of one's own appearance was associated with the man's perception of it, and with certain job traits including an achievement-oriented job (related to the 'beautiful is good' rule?). It was negatively associated with having had children. Among men, a positive perception of one's own appearance seemed mainly determined by circumstances that were not mapped in this study, yet a connection to general job satisfaction, including a low anxiety level at the job and a feeling that one's job was significant for society, appeared.

Among women as well as men, a high estimate of the partner's appearance was associated with having chosen the other for sexual attraction reasons. While men's estimate of women's beauty declined with mothering, women's estimate of men's beauty was associated with their partners' behaviour, including a more positive evaluation of men 'helping out' in the home. There was a positive association between general couple relationship satisfaction and the estimate of one's partner's looks among women, while these traits were not related among the men.

In order to test hypotheses regarding subsequent relationship effects of exchange-like partner selection, I constructed an index for '*relationship mobility*' based on a number of items. These included small or no knowledge of the partner before the relationship, that the relationship was started on the basis of 'love at first sight', emphasis on external criteria (looks, status) in the selection process, a belief that the relationship might break up in the future due to oneself finding a new partner, having had many earlier relationships, and having considered divorce.

"The results show that the mobility index constitutes a meaningful dimension among men as well as women. (..) An association appears between having had many earlier relationships, having started the present one based on little knowledge of the other (..) and having experienced divorce in childhood. We also have clear indications that this dimension is a perceived reality in the relationship. (..) For example, many women who married to men who had based their partner selection on 'love at first sight'

thought that the man in the future would find a new partner, even if the men themselves did not state this" (Holter 1990c:101-2). Further, relationship mobility was related to conflict avoidance and low job loyalty. The balance of interest in the relationship was also involved, especially among the men. "The men with high scores on the index also often have partners who are more interested than they themselves are in keeping the relationship intact, and these men are generally less satisfied with their relationship than other men. Among women, physical attractiveness is more important than the balance of interest. Women who consider themselves pretty have considerably higher index scores than other women. These women also more often tell about disagreement about sex in the relationship."

Yet the most striking finding in this part of the study was the strong connection between external partner selection criteria and later jealousy in the relationship. Relationships started on the basis of 'love at first sight' had more jealousy problems than those started on the basis of a preceding friendship. This result seems to confirm an 'easy come, easy go' rule. It also shows how the tension connected to genderisation may turn into overt conflict.

In sum, "I hypothesised that market logic in the entry to the couple relationship would increase the insecurity within it later. This was clearly confirmed. Lack of knowledge of the other and the use of external criteria in the partner selection increase the risk of jealousy, sexual conflict, adultery and divorce. On the other hand, there is no clear association between market logic in the relationship and an unbalanced distribution of benefits and burdens in the home. Market-related criteria probably contribute to a somewhat less balanced division of work in the home, yet this is not a main trait." (Op.cit. 148). A negotiation model of the relationship emerged as a much more dominant feature than in the commuter study, a kind of homecoming of the competitive team.

In view of the amount of 'shadow' domestic work shouldered by the wives and female partners in this study, it is perhaps not so surprising that we also found an authority dimension stretching from jobs to homes. Specifically, the employed women's evaluation of their husbands was quite strongly connected to their evaluation of their job superiors – as if one's boss and husband were on some level overlapping figures.

## 'Equity 1994'

The *Equity 1994* (Likeverd 1994) representative survey is the most recent of a string of national-level surveys about gender, family, and equality questions in Norway, pioneered by sociologist Erik Grønseth and others in the early 1970s. I have been involved in the making of some of these surveys, and in the statistical preparation and interpretation of the results of the others (Holter 1989h). The following exposition is restricted to discussing some results regarding family arrangements and gender conceptions. Some main tendencies appeared:

(1) A *gradual advance* of perceived gender equal status in every day and family life, connected to women's larger proportion of the family income and other traits.

(2) "*Equal status yes, homogenisation no*". There was a marked preference for equity ('likeverd') issues vis-à-vis equal status issues that imply that the genders should be alike each other, and, especially, that women should resemble men. The proportion of the Norwegian population that agreed in a general statement that "gender equality politics have now gone far enough" had increased slightly (to 63 percent) over the last years.

(3) *An emphasis on care issues*. Issues relating to *care*, on the other hand, received support in the eighty percent plus region. In this area we also found support for desegregation, in favour increased male participation in home work and child care. Yet there were indications of a split response in this issue.

In general, if care and home issues were associated with gender equality proposals, the support for further equality policies was large; if not, it was moderate to small. Also, concrete improvements for women in wage work received high support. The morale seems to be: women should achieve better status, rewards, benefits, etc. *where they happen to be*, regardless of context, while a policy that some perceive as an attempt to push them into masculine positions receives more mixed appraisals.<sup>11</sup>

(4) *Men are seen in inconsistent, or at least very different ways*, and are, at least potentially a topic of debate and controversy in Norwegian families. The problem picture of men in the public debate and in the media emerged in this study. Men who were known or close to women were much better regarded than 'men' as such. Women often wanted their own husbands or partners to contribute more to domestic and care tasks, while also arguing, on a general level, that men were less fit than women for some of these chores, caring for small children especially. As much as 45 percent of the women believed that women are more fit to care for small children than men are, while only 31 percent said the same in a 1989 survey. Among men there was a similar but smaller change, from 56 percent in 1989 to 65 percent in 1994.

(5) These figures seem to reflect *increased 'traditionalism'*. Other and more concrete factors may also be important. In the preceding years, the media had given much more attention to 'male role problems' than they did in the 1980s, often in a negative and problem-enhancing framework. Also, a sexual abuse case involving men in a kindergarten (the Bjugn case) had recently received much attention. It is also possible that the rising 'women are best fit'-attitude among women may reflect a perceived threat that care leave reforms involving men (which had recently come on the agenda) and similar changes would weaken their traditional position. Such views were often voiced in other areas, like the 'who shall have the children after divorce' debate. I am fairly convinced that in their own private lives, most of these women would want their own man to be as competent as they themselves were, for example when the baby cried at night, and not just to leave it all to them.

(6) On the other hand, rising traditionalism may also be interpreted as a background cause of another main finding of the survey: a *standstill in the domestic labour division*. There were even some weak signs of a setback, compared to the late 1980s situation, yet I think these are spurious. The interpretation problems in this area are interesting by themselves, since they concern researchers as well as people in families. One major trait concerned *increased conflict* regarding interpretations of who did what.

In many couples, members want one thing and practice another, and although the '*unreality rate*' (gap between ideals and practices) seemed to have gone down a bit, compared to 1980s studies, the '*inconsistency rate*' (gap between the wife's and the husband's view) had gone up. Men's reports on who does what in the home indicated a continued, if slow, movement towards a more egalitarian work division, while women reported a standstill. Around 70 percent (women's view: 74 percent, men's view: 63) of couples were characterised by the woman doing all or most of the domestic work in a traditionally female area like meal preparation, while in around 60 percent (women: 65, men: 53) of the couples, she was the one who used most time with the children. These proportions had not decreased since the late 1980s, according to the women.

Yet while 83 percent of the men agreed with women's evaluation of who did what regarding meal preparation in a 1989 survey, only 62 percent did so in the 1994 survey. The results do not directly say if this increased gap was due mainly to a more restrictive evaluation of men's efforts by women or to a more positive self-evaluation among men; there are signs in both directions. By 1994 it had probably become a bit more difficult to say 'we share equally' when one did not do so in practice. The increased focus on men and the notion that men *should* participate may also explain part of the increase in report inconsistency.

(7) *A new role of 'traditionalism'*? According to the preceding discussions of commodity logic and market conditions in the family sphere, one might expect contrary tendencies to appear. The 1994 survey did offer some indications in that direction. From other evidence, it is clear that a segregated domestic labour division did not have the same larger 'meaning' in 1994 as, say, twenty years earlier. The whole reciprocity framework connected to gender had changed. For example the question of whether a wife should work outside was no longer an issue in 1994 – if she wanted to, of course she should; a husband saying no would be perceived as venturing into a terrain where he had no legitimate rights. That, however, *was* an issue, even a public issue, in the 1960s and early 1970s, and in early 1980s studies, I met women drawing the line at precisely this point; "if he cannot accept your working, leave him". Similar background changes have probably affected the domestic task division, in the sense that having main responsibility for domestic and care tasks is increasingly seen not only as a duty but also as a privilege.<sup>12</sup>

A separate analysis of formerly divorced persons in this survey who answered a question about the initiative to divorce (N=149) gave some more concrete signs in this direction. Divorce initiative has usually been seen as connected to gender circumstances. At first sight, this was confirmed also in the present study, since 74 percent of the initiators were women. However, further multivariate analysis of the link between 'traditionality' and initiative gave some surprising new results. The 'traditionality' index was constructed from two items, being in a relationship where the woman did all or most of the meal preparation, and agreeing that women are better fit for caring for small children. While traditionality was *not* correlated with having experienced divorce, it *was* related with the issue of who had taken the initiative to divorce. This association was quite strong, as strong as the one to gender. Regardless of gender, those who scored high on the traditionality index had initiated divorce considerably less often than others. At the same time these 'traditionalists', the men especially, had considerably more often than others experienced that their former partner had initiated a divorce. Although other factors might come into this (like a

high traditionality score being related to a certain rather subjective interpretation of who took the initiative, to a more passive emotional role, etc.), it remains an interesting result. I believe the most likely explanation is related to what was said above: the meaning of 'traditionalism' is changing in the Norwegian context, becoming less of a defence of male authority and more of a shelter against market tendencies. Such a line of interpretation might help explain why couples 'stick to differences' also in a more gender-egalitarian social and cultural setting.

Some further information regarding men and divorce is of interest in the traditionalism context, since it is connected the preceding discussions of 'shadow work' as well as gift relations. Altogether, 37 percent of the respondents agreed with a statement saying that men in practice hinder equal status. This view was fairly equally distributed between women and men, varying primarily with education, with the most sceptical view of men among those with least education. Among women, scepticism towards men was also connected to two other traits in the survey; having experienced a male partner whose job influenced the relationship negatively, and agreeing with the view that women are more fit than men to care for children. The shadow work negative influence appeared even stronger among the women who had taken initiative to divorce.

The negative view of men and what is probably a 'keep the monopoly' attitude among some women contributed to women's answers regarding children and divorce, while men's answers confirm the impact of 'male role' discussions and other recent debate concerning children's need for their fathers. In Norway as elsewhere, divorces or breakups between parents lead more or less automatically to the children staying with the woman (in about nine out of ten cases), with the children visiting the father every other weekend and a day in between as the normal arrangement. On the issue of where children should live after divorce, the answers were split half-and-half, with a small majority supporting a "fairly equally with both parents" alternative. As could be expected, this issue divided men and women – and it created a much wider gender gap than any question concerning women's positions or rights in wage work. 62 percent of the women did not support the "fairly equal" alternative; yet the rest 38 percent is still a fairly large minority, and perhaps the more noteworthy figure in this context. As much as 79 percent of the men supported a change from the present arrangement, mostly the equality alternative (65 percent), while some (14 percent) believed the children should live with the father.<sup>13</sup> Since a proportion of ninety (with the mother) to ten (equally or with the father) would have been in line with the actual current arrangement, the support for the egalitarian alternative from many women may also be seen as a gift – and perhaps even as a response to gifts that have *not* only been 'lacking' from men.

In this perspective, it is noteworthy as much as 83 percent of the *men* agreed that domestic care work experience should count as job qualification on the level of other work experience in the labour market. This is a change that would work against most men as individuals in the market vis-à-vis women, since they have less care work experience. Still, it would help these men as family men, living with partners or wives with better jobs and thereby sharing the bread ticket more equally. As mentioned, care and gender equity issues have an 'ideal appeal' in the Norwegian context, especially when they come together, like here, so the result may reflect a bit of a 'reflex answering'. Even so, however, it remains remarkable that such a massive majority of



men were positive to a proposed change that, if effectuated, would mean that men became less competitive vis-à-vis women in the labour market. It is thought-provoking also when one considers the host of theories explaining (labour) market behaviour purely in terms of individualistic rationality.

Throughout these issues, a major emphasis on care, children and the home emerges, together with conflicting views on the actual task division. Some of the results can also be interpreted as a gift pattern where *her* gift to *him* in terms of understanding him as a family man, and his gift to her in terms of understanding her as a wage worker and public life participant, complement each other, or do so somewhat more than before. Three barriers emerge, regarding this gift to the man: the continuous reluctance of many men to participate more in household and care work; a view of some women that men are best kept in the periphery, or at least not given equal rights in the home sphere; and a split view of men, especially among women, with a gap between 'men as such' (negative, untrustworthy) and the concrete husband or partner. The problem of Jeff Hearn's (1993) 'men in the public eye' is not just the men but also the eye. In a study of the Norwegian male role debate in the 1980s, Knut Oftung (1992) shows a split portrait of men as aggressors and as victims as well as a common tendency to fill the category of men with problems. It is quite clear that *patriarchy* was the subject of much of this debate, addressed in *alias* form, through 'men'.

## Exploitation and the home

Can we talk of 'exploitation' in the domestic sphere? If the gender relation, the family formation process and the work life/family life relationship have economic aspects, they may also have exploitation aspects. In this section, I discuss some practical issues regarding the sociological notion of exploitation (Norw. '*utnyttning*'). The wider theory issues in this area are discussed later (chap. 13). Three arguments are presented. Firstly, domestic exploitation in the sociological sense is important also for qualitative analysis. Secondly, it is in principle possible give an objective account of it, even if not all items can be economically measured. Thirdly, exploitation in this area is more complex than was realised in the 'domestic labour debate' in the early 1980s, involving several systems rather than one.

*The importance of domestic sphere exploitation.* None of the studies discussed above prove the existence of domestic exploitation in economic terms. What they do, however, is to make such a proposition likely in broader sociological terms, along with many similar studies. In a Norwegian study, Haavind & Andenes (1990) found an "underlying principle" of asymmetry beneath the more overt level of symmetry. On the basis of economic resource theory and patriarchy theory, using US income data from 1969 and 1983, Heath and Ciscel (1988) argue that two-wage earner families remain patriarchal over time, that women's relative contribution to household labour rises with increased paid employment, and that "working women's market labour is being increasingly exploited if they remain married, because their hours are longer and their personally unclaimable worth higher". Considerable evidence exists concerning the 'invisibilisation' of domestic work, a feeling of one's achievements not being noticed, its low status rating in many if not all respects (e.g. Oakley, A 1974), while on the other hand its importance has also increasingly been underlined, not as physical drudgery but as part of recreating the family as 'subject space', a home as more than a household. Since domestic work and care work are so strongly



interconnected, new technology has not led to the decrease in time use that many materialists have expected throughout the 20th. century (Vanek, J 1980). Housework has not lived up to the idea that it could just be 'done away with'; instead, increased welfare has created new levels of achievement as well as more care-oriented definitions of tasks. At the same time, there can be little doubt that household work and anything associated with it remain underprivileged in our society.

As we saw, domestic work mainly remains women's work even in the egalitarian Norwegian setting. In a national, and even more in a global perspective, the attempts to change the work division seem to run up against some very strong and persistent contrary forces. It is not strange, therefore, that researchers increasingly look in the direction of economy and exploitation in order to understand those forces. As mentioned earlier there have recently been signs of renewed attention towards this area. This is often expressed as an emphasis on "measuring women's unpaid activities" in the home sphere and elsewhere. While this is an important step forward, the ambiguity of the word 'unpaid', meaning 'uncompensated activity' and/or 'non-monetarily compensated activity', is also indicative, showing the need for research and conceptualisation.

As long as the evidence is mainly partial, subjective or only qualitative, the research and public debate on domestic exploitation remain on the level of what goes on in many homes: one may notice, or then again one may not. Each can 'take their side', or be eclectic about what they want to acknowledge regarding the domestic sphere, men's and women's roles there, and its relation to wage work organisations and to society at large. As far as we are dealing with dyadic gender, this attitude is perhaps fair and good. Yet dyadic gender, we have found, was not the only aspect of gender in partner selection, and neither is it the only one at any stage thereafter. The two-layered character of gender relations and the deeper-layer asymmetrical pattern reappear as we move from the transfer to the household and activity sphere. Most of the evidence discussed above, and that from the *Equity 1994* survey in particular, should be seen in this light: people very much *want* to interpret things on a symmetrical level. Some real advances, plus a widespread idea that 'women's liberation' is no longer needed, contribute to this tendency.

*The problems of mapping domestic sphere exploitation.* Although household work has been of main importance for developing statistics of time use, mapping exploitation statistically is more difficult. There is an 'output' which is only approached in terms of time use, and an 'input' which also is not easy to determine. The input and output are not formalised in monetary terms *as* input and output of household work, even if money does appear in both contexts (in consumption and in the sale of labour power respectively). Yet exploitation is a 'difficult' matter in most contexts, its existence creating diverging views and not-so-incidental confusion; it would be strange if it did not. Recognising domestic sphere activity *as* activity has never simply been an 'objective' question, but also a struggle, and the same goes for recognising exploitation. Today, some people who otherwise are sympathetic to equal status and feminist views argue that domestic sphere exploitation cannot be mapped, or must remain a subjective matter. I do not agree with this view; instead I believe that the theoretical as well as the empirical problems can be solved, and that the theory question, including a broader 'willingness to notice', is in fact the main issue, not the questions of empirical operationalisation.

As an illustration of some of the empirical possibilities, we may assume a very simple model in which marriages are exploitative; through this institution, men exploit women. This was a main line of argument in feminist debate in the 1970s and it has not exactly lost all relevancy. How could the existence of such a form of exploitation be empirically mapped? Certainly, this is possible, and there are several ways to go about it. One might start from a rather literal 'material factor' interpretation (not so far from some Ricardian approaches) and define input and output in terms of energy spent and calories received. Are the input and output of married men and women the same, or not? Do women, *per* unit of outlay or burden, receive the same benefit, or do they not? Further, if this literal 'physiocratic' approach is problematic, one might study the *differential effects* of domestic labour. Do *men* with such background support make better careers than those who do not have it? Do *firms*, branches or other wage work organisations involving much 'shadow work', profit from it – or do they not?

The main fact in this area is that such questions have not been raised and studied, not that it is 'impossible' to study them. Their 'shadow' economic existence is reflected in their 'grey zone', 'not-much-known'-zone existence in research. On the other hand, the *qualitative* evidence that exists today, pointing to the likelihood that exploitation is involved in gender relations in the domestic sphere as elsewhere, can only be described as massive. The lack of quantitative analyses is not simply due to 'patriarchal unwillingness', but perhaps mainly to feminist researchers' own unwillingness to move in this direction – for reasons discussed later (chapter 13). Paradoxically, market liberalists on the one hand and gift relations upholders and feminists 'alternativists' on the other hand may find themselves in agreement in this issue.

*The existence of different exploitative patterns.* Yet it should be recognised that the patterns of exploitation and household organisation are more complex than usually conceived in the early 1980s domestic labour debate, and more varied.

A 'triadic' perspective on power and influence in the domestic sphere has been implicated above, and it can be outlined in brief terms here. In this view, men and women both have spheres of power and influence. Subordination of women is relative, not absolute; women's secondary position in society at large, as well as in families, is connected to the overall subordination of their sphere, rather than an absolute lack of influence. As is discussed later, this model makes sense of much seemingly contradictory research in the domestic sphere and elsewhere, whereas the alternatives – absolute oppression, a two-class view of gender *or* a full symmetry, no oppression view – do not.

This model can be used also for investigating exploitation, especially when another, related pattern is brought in also. Potentially exploitative relations can be found on several levels, with somewhat different 'objects' and forms of exploitation. At least three targets of exploitation can be distinguished – women, reproductive or inner-objectivating activities, and expressive or femininity-associated traits. These are linked, but also different.

The triadic model and the three levels of exploitation make sense when considered as a whole. We may start with the 'shadow work' discussed above, and the probability of jobs exploiting families. This involves all the three levels, and exploitation of

reproductive activities especially. Secondly, this relationship is transmitted and translated into internal family relations, usually meaning that the man's job goes before the woman's activities. Together with other factors, including men's 'patriarchal dividend' (discussed in the next chapter), it creates an asymmetrical relationship, with exploitation of women as its main result. In turn, these two relations create a basis for women's counterstrategies and sphere of influence.

The triadic exploitation structure changes according to concrete circumstances, personal resources, and many other factors. For example, the fact that men, according to the model, participate in an exploitation of women on a general level, does not mean that all men in all circumstances participate in that process. What is involved, instead, is the sociological probability that men generally partake in the benefits from women's uncompensated labour. Further, the model does not make women into angels or victims only. It brings women's zone of influence into view as something more than an incidental effect.

If women are objects of beauty in the gender market, they may also be its subjects, or overseers, in the home. Here as elsewhere the market turns things around. There is a zone of 'personal utilisation' connected to women that may involve exploitation, even if its form usually differs from the male form. This zone is usually more person-directed, more gift-like, and more subject-involving than men's forms. Since masculinity includes blindness towards women's sphere of control (men becoming smaller men if they are under women's influence, etc.), interviews with women often bring more of this sphere into light, for example when women tell of their mothers' sacrificial power strategies ('if you do not do as I say, I shall die'). The anthropological notion of the gift as a 'terrible thing', quite different from the modern idea of the gift as an ideal commodity ('fully free'), is a main theme in this context. Together with the shadow work goes a 'shadow accounting' which may not count for much on the immediate, economical level, yet it may be a main part of family reality in sociological terms (Holter 1995a).<sup>14</sup>

This line of approach differs from one in which exploitation analysis is used for simplification and creating 'order' in a complex interactional setting. The point, instead, is to understand more of the dynamics within and between different interaction strategies. By arguing that women on the whole are exploited in the domestic sphere, we are not required to argue that women's domestic roles only involve burdens, and no benefits, nor that men's roles are only power roles.

The usual problem when exploitation is left behind as an 'ideological' category is that the analysis loses its sting also. It gets out of touch with real life. We all know the fear of being exploited on a personal level in private life. Avoiding this danger is clearly one part of our motivations. It is a real danger, even if it is surrounded by all kinds of ghosts and mythical imaginations. These would not have been as pervasive, if no real issues had been involved. Therefore, analyses that do not take these matters into account easily become unrealistic.

## The dual role of gift relations

Rather than the idea of a life world threatened by a systems world, or capitalism intruding on a virginal 'use value-only' terrain, I focus on the *reorganisation* of the family sphere as part of a changing society.<sup>15</sup> However, the link between the two is often best approached as a contradiction. Despite spillover of job traits, homes do not simply imitate work places. I have presented empirical evidence that makes sense if we consider the creation of couple and family reality as a continuous counterproposal to the changing tendencies in the sphere of production and in society at large. What appears as an intrusion of 'market forces', then, can be interpreted as a reorganisation of this link; three or four generations ago, 'authoritarian forces' were scarcely less intrusive. This is discussed later in a broader historical perspective on the shifting patriarchal settings of the modern era (chap. 12).

The character of gift relations can also be approached in this perspective. In the more authoritarian setting, gifts reworked authority; today they rework the market. In social form terms, gifts are transferential. If commodities march, gifts dance. With contractual definitions of marriage, gifts become binding; with increased emphasis on negotiation, they dissolve its hard edges; in the face of marketability, they confer individual worth. Growing 'flexibilisation' of the work force probably accentuate gift-giving in new ways. Commodities have become more dynamic also: if the typical breadwinner industrial society job 'lorded it' *over* the family, the new dynamic jobs increasingly lord it *in* them. As jobs increasingly follow persons, not being limited to the traditional work place, personal characteristics and job characteristics become further mixed, to the extent that family disputes may sometimes look more like job disputes, transmitted through family members. In turn, all these trends create contrary or oppositional movements, some of them expressed in renewed or invigorated gift terms.

Increasing importance of gift relations can be found within the flexible wage work organisations also, or in networks, with gifts acting as binding agents. In view of the tendencies towards personification of jobs, Tian Sørhaug (1996:161-2 my trans.) writes of the 'double body' of the leader, and the necessity to keep the leadership 'body' or position and the personal body apart. "Leaders have a great need to protect and develop this non-identity [between these two]. Identity eliminates the space that any form of power needs in order to reflect about itself." Yet in our culture, he writes, many norms idealise the "need to be identical to oneself", including individual integrity and spontaneity. Still, "persons in both ends of a leadership relation must have the possibility to be a bit 'thing-like'. Some human qualities must be *alienated* if persons (and bodies) are to survive. If not, it becomes impossible to execute or criticise power without destroying concrete persons." In other words, all kinds of devalorisation are not positive. Like anarchism may hide authoritarianism, gift relations may create more insidious forms of power than the more formal bureaucratic ones. In some ways, typical women's dilemmas thereby also become the flexible leaders' dilemmas, without the "luxury of alienation" that was the "male prerogative" in traditional organisation (Meissner, M 1975).

Gift relations in families do not only 'answer' wage work developments. Two other common patterns appear, one which is conservative in terms of gender, the other more oppositional or radical. I shall describe some main traits of each.

The 'gender-conservative' role of gifts was touched upon in relation to the patterns of duty, sacrifice and unequal exchange in the commuter families, where it often appeared linked to the 'negative cycles'. These patterns may not be especially conservative in intent, yet they are often conservative in effect, in relation to the meaning of femininity and the roles of women.

The class-conservative role of gift relations is important in this context. It is connected to the difference between the solidarity framework and the gift-giving framework, which is in fact a wide cultural, sociological and historical gap that appears in many areas.

Working class culture has traditionally been characterised by scepticism towards gifts. Not only are gifts what the rich can afford, it is also a *disguise* of what goes on; the rich prefers to be seen as givers, while in reality they are not. The point, here, is not that one should return to an exchange rationality, but that the gift rationality often is only the *sentimentalised* version of exchange. So instead of giving and receiving, the working class ideal is one of *sharing*, and this should be done in outright and honest ways, based on common interests, and not as a kind of subdued message system for people unable to present their real standpoint.

As can be seen, there are diverging 'cultures of transfer' involved here, besides ideological differences. Instead of silent assumptions, the emphasis is on being direct and explicit, and on practical actions rather than words or attitudes. For example, women in the rural sample of the commuter study, emphasising a gift-oriented marriage, often voiced opinions to the effect that '*if you have to ask for it, it becomes worthless*'. The urban working class attitude, instead, is not simply to ask for it, and leave if one does not get it, but to share it, and leave if the sharing is not reciprocal. It is true that a 'silent harmony model' can be found in working class marriages also, yet the model itself is probably mainly linked to the gift setting, and it has partially different bases and dynamics in the working class context. From the working class point of view, the distanced positions of worthiness so typical of gift relations may look like commodity logic *plus* family facade – including an attempt to 'be' somebody one is not, usually a target of derision. When feminists present the 'good' picture of gifts without bringing these matters into consideration, the effect is not only a women's view, but also a middle or upper class view.<sup>16</sup>

Although relations are slanted in women's disfavour also in the sharing and solidarity setting, there are some realist issues involved in this critique of gift relations. Gift relations are linked to *class homogeneity* and *class mobility* in the family sphere – not gifts in isolation, but in an interplay with exchange relations. Although this is an understudied area, there is little doubt that these two together on the whole are more closely connected to class and mobility considerations than the sharing framework.

Contemporary marriage, Max Haller (1981) argues, is influenced by social stratification that operates through differential association, "emerging as a complement to the class formation, preserving collective social identity within a world characterised by pervasive economic inequality. This leads to a long term macro-social reproduction of inequality when this process penetrates husband-wife and parent-child relations."

Haller's argument illustrates the difference between an institutional approach and an "insider" view of the family as a cultural construct, a shared reality, and similar. In the first view, a central topic concerns how family institutionalisation is linked to wider societal processes like those associated with social class. The second view easily leads to an analytical isolation of 'the' family, also when the analysis is grounded on feminist premises, since the two main parties seem to be present there and then, within the family. The general effect of institutional and more macro-sociological approaches is to put family realities in a somewhat darker light ('pervasive economic inequality') and to emphasise the contributions from both parties, not just the man, in keeping up the family facade and pushing the home upwards in class terms.

Studies in Norway (Moxnes, K 1989) as well as in other western European countries (e.g. Bourdieu 1984:241pp.) show that class homogamy has not disappeared. Recent evidence of growing class differences may imply that this tendency has been strengthened. A demographic study in the US (Jacobs & Furstenberg 1986) found no decrease in homogamy from first to second marriage, nor a cohort decrease from those born around 1930 to those born around 1955. In the US it has even been argued, from a sociobiological perspective, that the whole process of class- and gender-assortative mating has been carried so far that it increasingly creates "extreme phenotypes" (Buss, D 1985). US demographic data indicate increasing educational and age homogamy through the 1980s (Qian & Preston 1993). It should be noted that this 'gender-assortative' element, as far as it follows the 'she is, he has' rule discussed earlier, also creates a specific female marital mobility.<sup>17</sup> This is related to the 'class edge' of the beauty object, the fact that beauty still 'pre-selects' women in terms of upwards class movement.<sup>18</sup>

A concrete example may substantiate the idea that the gift framework does indeed relate to class and gender traditionalism. This concerns the 'lacking gift from the husband' theme that appeared in the commuter case and in other studies. What is often implicit in this context is the notion that *she* has given herself to *him* in the first place, and so he should now fulfil *his* part of this transfer.

In interviews with men, especially equality-oriented men, I have often met the contrary complaint that this kind of transfer was not what they wanted in the first place.<sup>19</sup> They felt that the gift-giving terms imposed a familistic traditionalism which was not really what they had chosen. They often voiced a complaint about being required *both* to fulfil some very traditional expectations of what a man should be like, *and* a new set of expectations of what he should *not* be like – with rather contradictory elements. Such contradictory experiences may, in turn, make men put renewed emphasis on their job and career orientation, as a kind of 'safe area' (a tendency in the *Men's Life Patterns* study discussed in the next chapter). In many variants on this theme, one finds that gift and exchange terms may both have effects that are rather different from the intentions, creating a more traditional relationship situation.

Highlighting the conservative role of gifts in terms of gender and class is important in order to demystify gift relations. If the uniqueness ideal of the gift held true, gift giving would tend to dissolve class as well as gender divisions; in practice it does not. As shall be shown later, the gift-giving discussed here is only a small subcategory of gifts in a wider historical and anthropological perspective. It is a special kind of



giving which is operative only in the close vicinity, on the broader map, of commodity relations.

Gifts also have other and more radical roles. The conservative or conformist traits leave much to be explained. If gift giving sometimes is camouflaged exchange, why not exchange directly instead? Why is there a common ideal of gift relations in the family sphere, including the working class sense of gifts as shared? Why do these elements become the general *ground* of family life? Here the '*oppositional*' or counterpoised role of gifts once more come into view, including giving as a family formation process, creating closer relations of sharing. They help create a common ground in a wide, yet also very important sense, one involving 'the sense of family' itself, or what has been called "*the us-ness*" (Marianne Sætre) or the we-feeling of the family, as a kind of focal point of the mutually constructed reality. So it may be argued that *other* kinds of considerations commonly must 'work through' this level in order to be legitimately voiced; they must make '*family sense*' whatever their sense outside that context. A new *social scaling*, a reordering of priorities, is involved here, with 'small' matters becoming large, and 'large' ones small, as I have described more fully in another context (Holter 1995a).

This is not all, however. This kind of 'grounding' does not fall down from the heavens or establish itself just because it creates what is lacking in society at large, a 'safe haven' or at least 'time off'. Some terms from later discussions must be anticipated here. A social forms perspective on different reciprocity forms does not imply that these forms, like gifts and commodities, are necessarily parallel or symmetrical cases. More specific interrelationships are usually involved, and one main feature of these, not least in a modern context, is a *hierarchy*. So a *power dimension* must be brought more clearly into the analysis.

It is commonly known that those in power tend to develop means to split the powerless, and to mask stratification *as* differentiation. One main point of the subsequent analysis of patriarchal strategy (chap. 12) is that this is a two-way process. The powerless have *differentiation interests* also, and as far as I know, this point has generally been overlooked in the gender context as elsewhere. The defensive measures of the powerless usually include differentiation, and sometimes a main counter-strategy of the powerless relies precisely on an attempt to *change stratification measures into differentiation measures*. In fact we have met quite a bit of this already, in the attempt to turn asymmetrical difference into symmetrical difference. While this rule is a fairly wide and common principle, it receives special *emphasis* in the face of specific forms of dominance, especially economic dominance. This makes sense when we reconsider the example of Marx's market model as Hegel's master/slave model turned on its side, discussed in the last chapter: with more horizontal relations, the whole ground of power as well as opposition to power shifts.

The insistence on gifts that can be found among women as well as in much feminist theory may be interpreted in this light. It creates an '*otherness discourse*' that should not be seen narrowly as a more beneficial terrain of opposition, but more principally as a way of asserting the subjective reality, or indeed *the subject*, as something beyond the less-or-more, pro-et-contra logic of stratification.<sup>20</sup> The new roles of family traditionalism and the maintenance of segregation can be seen in this perspective.

As the beauty object of the gender market becomes the central family subject, there is more than a turnaround of market apparitions involved. Instead that 'object' itself should partly be interpreted on this new terrain, as a way of signalling later subject status or subjectivity. One result from the gender market study comes to mind at this point. To my surprise, I found that most of the women interviewed there did *not* agree that their 'beauty work', their preparations before going out, were mainly directed towards the *men*; instead they emphasised its importance vis-à-vis *other women*. At the time, I interpreted this as part of the market competition rules, yet that is clearly insufficient. MacKinnon's and other feminists' analyses of sex objectification have similar problems: why, if this is such a hot-spot of subordination, are women so heavily into it themselves? Women's attention to how they look, to their faces, bodies and clothes, certainly does not erase what has been argued regarding the beauty object, but it does bring some further moments into light. What emerges is a *contested terrain* where there is a continuous attempt to re-establish asymmetry *as* difference, all the more important precisely since this asymmetry involves the aforementioned 'objectification', thereby paradoxically creating conditions for subjectivity.

The horizontal shifts created by these dynamics where power is 'answered' through a non-answer, while stratification is denied in terms of *difference*, may create an effective counterstrategy in some respects, while in others, the main assumptions and premises of the powerful are only further developed. Difference-based power strategies along with similar counter-strategies emphasising women's position beyond (male) society may together lead into a terrain of *devalorisation* that is in fact more repressive than the old valorisation. The logic of gifts and sacrifices does not necessarily bow to market notions of equality or objectivity. One main theme of the following chapters thereby appears: how can women's position *below* and *beyond* be conceptualised in combination, without one obscuring the other? This depends on an understanding of a third main trait of women's situation, a positioning *between*, which in turn puts the focus on *men*.

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<sup>1</sup> An outline of this debate can be found in Levin, I 1994 (and other papers in that issue). Jan Trost (1994:47) summarises some changes: "Traditionally (..) five elements were linked together (..): the law, the wedding, moving together, having sex, and expecting a child later. Now there is in practice almost no link between these elements."

<sup>2</sup> I was employed at the WRI in 1980, after the gender market study (my sociology magister degree thesis).

<sup>3</sup> A gender theory group, and in a periods also a gender equal status research program, were created. In my own case, I participated in a number of these studies, yet I also felt the need to develop my views of gender and patriarchy as a project on its own, distinct from the WRI agenda, and for reasons discussed later, I turned a three-year research grant (from the social science research council) on 'relationship change' ('samlivsendring') into historical studies of early gender and patriarchy questions.

<sup>4</sup> For a tripartite variant of the typology (exchange, duty, sharing), discussed in terms of an in-depth family study, cf. Moxnes, K 1990:136pp. Moxnes found that exchange orientation, characterising about 17 percent of her couples, was most frequent among young and recently married. Duty orientation, 30 percent, was most frequent among older couples who had got married in the 1940s and 1950s. Sharing orientation characterised about 25 percent, more women than men, while the rest 28 percent gave a more mixed impression (N=132 persons).



<sup>5</sup> A main finding from studies of youth culture and other popular culture is relevant here and in many other gender and family issues: the powerful have for long learned and/or been forced to build on cultural traits of the powerless. The bourgeoisie wearing jeans, rather than the workers wearing top hats.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted from Duhm, D 1975:77, my trans.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Berk, S 1985 for a similar view of US families, and Solheim, J 1995:55-8 who goes further and connects feminine tasks to purification rituals.

<sup>8</sup> In the typical rural location, we might find a fairly affluent-looking sailor family's house alongside the noticeably grander new house of the North Sea employee and his family. If the first had one car, the second could afford two.

<sup>9</sup> It is of some interest in this context that one main study of Norwegian industrial pressure on workers in the 1950s, Sverre Lysgaard's (1967) project on the worker's collective (*Arbeiderkollektivet*), portrays a defensive attitude towards the 'relentless technical-economic system' which corresponded to the 'family as shelter' ideal of the same period. A later study indicates that some of this pressure was nevertheless brought home and transmitted, in the form of authoritarianism and brutality, from fathers to their sons (Holter 1989a).

<sup>10</sup> In defence of the questionnaire method, which sometimes attracts a rather superficial criticism from qualitative-minded researchers, it should also be mentioned that the anonymous, self-report questionnaire method may yield more honest answers in 'touchy' areas than other methods. Some of the items brought forth in the present case would probably have been harder to uncover through interviews.

<sup>11</sup> The failure of desegregation measures in work life may also be noted in this context. Recently, teachers in information technology studies voiced their concern that this field would become fully masculine – the proportion of female students having decreased from c. 20 to c. 5 percent (in Oslo) over the last years. This is a fairly typical detail; unless there are active desegregation campaigns, things 'fall back' to a very segregated 'normal state' – also in new sectors like this one.

<sup>12</sup> In the household as elsewhere work includes supervision. I am not implying that *doing* all housework is perceived as a privilege. Supervising the home and the family, being the main 'overseer' in informal terms, is another matter. Several new studies give indications that women are often ambivalent or negative if men try to move into this 'social centre' position (Holter 1995a).

<sup>13</sup> This was a hypothetical question ("If you had children, and were divorced, where would you want the children to live?"), yet the answers did not seem strongly connected to parental or divorce experience.

<sup>14</sup> Already in 1982, Nancy Chodorow and Susan Contratto (1982:68-9) criticised a feminist tendency to overlook the negative realities of maternal power linked to "accepting fantasy [of the good mother] as the self-evident basis of theory", and they also found a tendency in feminist literature to avoid opposing maternal violence (and instead attribute it to patriarchy, when it was described). Irigaray's portrayal of male discourse as an endless vacillation between the good and the bad mother figure, 'really' about the mother, and many other writings in this direction may be seen in this light (in the view of Toril Moi, Irigaray's 'morphological' model of femininity is itself very close to traditional patriarchal premises). Sometimes, the *silence* regarding women's power is broken by an all the more bleak version of femininity as sadomasochism, a 'terrible truth' in the background, and similar (akin to the 'all the more' tendency discussed earlier). This is not my view, but it can scarcely be doubted that women's own use of power remains an understated theme in feminist and gender studies – as well as in 'good guy' men's studies. In the view of psychologist Per Are Løkke (1996), *the whore fantasy* is the negative equivalent of the mother fantasy among men. Men "take revenge on the whore, not their mothers".

<sup>15</sup> Leonore Davidoff (1995:239) finds Habermas's 'privatised individual' to be a person who is 'consistently, if unconsciously, masculine'. A few points regarding the life world perspective are discussed in Appendix 3.

<sup>16</sup> I became acquainted with these working class traits through a three-year field work in the graphics industry in Oslo in the late 1970s, briefly described in the Foreword. Such traits are not immediately visible from the Academia point of view, and in general, the more in-depth the family study, the more they appear.

<sup>17</sup> The discussion about marital class mobility and women's own job careers cannot be fully addressed here. I keep to the common view that marrying a man with money and status does in fact improve the woman's own class position also. Also, considerable evidence exists regarding the 'corporate' character of families, and therefore I am sceptical towards the idea that married men and women pursue two wholly different class careers ('cross-class' families). Rejecting this position does not mean that one has to go back to the view where the man's job alone decides the issue. Both partners contribute to the family's class position, and the latter is also a matter of friendships, connections, personal resources and much else besides careers and wages. The class system is not just 'reflected' in the sphere of reproduction, whereas it 'really' is around in the sphere of production – it embraces both, and stands on its own two feet in both, even if it is often more *overt* in terms of institutionalisation in the sphere of production, like gender is more overt in the sphere of reproduction (cf. chap. 13).

<sup>18</sup> One may also argue, on the basis of the earlier discussion of the gender market as 'unintended outcome', that this effect is mainly a 'top-down' effect, i.e. men at the top mirroring their money and status in beautiful women creating a downwards pattern through the class hierarchy. Such a perspective makes further sense when combined recent studies of hegemonic masculinity, discussed in the next chapter. Although most action-oriented partner selection studies point to this kind of dynamics, it remains an understudied area.

<sup>19</sup> The context of these interviews and talks is described in the next chapter. Also, considerable evidence exist in family studies regarding the conservative aspect of women's gift-related 'familiarisation' strategies, which I am not able to review here (cf. Holter 1995a). For a historical perspective on the home with the woman as nature's gift to Victorian mankind, cf. Davidoff, L 1995. Collier et.al in Thorne & Yalom 1982:31 discusses the influence of this view – and the idea that "women are, and have at all times been, defined by nurturant, connective and reproductive roles that *do not change* through time" – on social anthropology.

<sup>20</sup> This is a main theme for example in the work of Fürst (1995) and other recent attempts to move beyond the 'dualism' of 'masculinistic' thought.

## Chapter 6 Men

"I disliked women living through their men. Women should not come openly forth. Women should not take the initiative. Instead men should do what women thought was right. It was difficult to be a man at that time. I did not say things right, I did not do things right. Women sometimes knew very well what a man should be like. And they had their sanctions. That was really a 'male role'. So I felt that the women's liberation was my own liberation from women's complaining and clinging. Women should no longer live through my actions and decisions. They should take responsibility for their own actions and live through their own decisions.

But did it happen that way? (...) From having been a son, a husband, a lover and a friend, I became an Oppressor. The South African apartheid regime and the US military-industrial complex became examples – or metaphors – of my power techniques [*herskertechnikker*]. My motives were stripped by feminine insight. Women knew how men were. (...) I can make fun and be ironic about being perceived as The Enemy, but I do not like it." (Reinton, P 1996:7, my trans.)

## Introduction

In 1986, the Norwegian government created a Male Role Committee with the mandate of discussing reforms, initiating research and contributing to debate related to the male role. The committee addressed men's situation in terms of gender equality and proposed equality measures with reference to men. While the effect of the media initiatives of the Committee and its practical impact was a matter of controversy, it did manage to put the question of men and gender equality on the public debate agenda, and it helped initiate a research tradition. Subsequently, its work has contributed to some political reforms, concerning men as fathers in particular.

In this chapter, I discuss some recent trends in the studies of men and masculinities in a social forms perspective, with a view to Norwegian and Nordic region experiences. Increasingly, studies have begun to approach the complex and manifold question of men's relationship to gender equal status issues. In the first period, the 1970s and early 1980s, studies of men in the Nordic countries as elsewhere mainly consisted of social reportage and topical literature. With increasing equal status gains especially in politics and public life, as well as increasing evidence of social and other problems among men, the questions of men and change emerged with more emphasis, focused on private life change. Most of the funding for masculinity-related studies could and can be found in this area. Men were put on the gender agenda as "derived subjects" (Helene Aarseth). Societal equality seemed within reach, while domestic work asymmetry and private life oppression including sexual abuse and battering remained, with the 'problem of men' as main barrier.

Back in the 1970s, when the idea of changing men was part of a feminist and radical movement that had yet had little impact on state policy, the main question was fairly clearcut. Are men oppressors, or allies; or: if men mainly belong to the oppressor side, what are the exceptions? In the 1980s the question was gradually rephrased: why do not men change, or not like egalitarian-minded women would want them to? The Male Role Committee was created on the basis of some minimal agreement between feminism and social democratic reform traditions: men are not altogether hopeless. Whatever one's view regarding the larger strategical questions of men's position in a patriarchal society, there is more potential support to be gathered for equal status goals among men than what exist. It should at least be possible to neutralise more of men's opposition towards equal status measures.

This agreement turned out to be fragile, and the committee was criticised by feminists for lack of societal analysis and feminist clarity regarding men. Some of its messages were indeed focused on 'sugaring the pill' – so much so that men also reacted.

An experience from a 'work and family' conference in one of the municipalities near Oslo illustrates this. – We had worked hard to get some men to attend, and they looked like they were expecting the worst when they came into the conference room and sat down. After the committee's spokesperson had talked, basically saying that men are OK and can develop a more positive masculine role, there was a long doubtful silence. The men looked at each other. Finally, a man of the audience rose angrily and asked why did the speaker did not tell the *truth*, which was what he had come to hear; he wanted to be *challenged*, not to listen to these official-sounding phrases!

So the question reemerges, through different contexts and in variant wording: Are men victims or oppressors in an unequal society? How can this issue be studied? Gradually, more nuanced perspectives allowing more differentiation of men have been developed, and in this chapter, I focus on one of these, starting a discussion of the *masculinity* approach to men, and especially the model of *hierarchical masculinities*. What this model allows, or allows with some limits, seems similar to what the man of the audience asked for: a critical examination of men in terms of gender as well as class, not as distant paradigms, but as part of life as men experience it.

There is also another side to the story just presented. It is not necessarily the case that the kind of *challenge* expected by the men in the audience would help create positive, long-term changes. It might have been a repetition of an old duel theme instead: the bad guys versus the good ones who have women and children in mind. The preceding chapters have made it clear that a 'men equal patriarchy' model is not proposed in this text – nor the 'patriarchy is irrelevant' model. I discussed the latter in terms of 'sugaring the pill'. In the greater perspective, it may be the case that this position *and* the challenging variant where men are declared patriarchs are in fact variants on one larger theme. They are still *men*, for example, to be thought about and categorised in this way. There is the 'social volume' mentioned earlier, the greater size that appears as soon as the abstract category of men is the point of departure – greater in society, that is, yet diminutive in private life, 'the little boy inside', the man who 'really' fears dependency, and so on.

Beyond the dualistic issue of whether one's picture of men is too oppressive and black or innocently white, there is a wider question of men's *realities*, of bringing in some real-life colour. This connected to the more complex strategy outlined in this and subsequent chapters: understanding patriarchy as a means to let go of a certain fixation, a mistaken idea that since patriarchy is *mediated* through gender, it *is* gender. There is a point where we all become comfortable when men are men, women women, whatever else – and it is precisely this edge of things, this more subtle staging, that needs to be explored, because it may just be that *this* is what mainly keeps patriarchy alive and well, and *not* the various roles taken on the stage itself.

As is often the case, a quick positioning on the surface goes together with lack of in-depth arguments and more nuanced theories. In women's and feminist studies, everyone 'knows' about men – to the point that little is actually known, in a deeper sense. Few specific theories exist. As Anna Jonasdóttir (1994:211) has recently emphasised (with special reference to the socialist feminist traditions) "men are either ignored or perceived as theoretically irrelevant in the analysis of women's

oppression". Although men *vaguely* identified with patriarchy or described as 'oppressors' can be found in all forms of feminism, *specific* theories of men's roles are still hard to come by.<sup>1</sup> The 'derived subject' and everyday level framework of most men's studies have contributed to a situation where such theories are not created in that field either, with some notable exceptions.

Three cases are presented in order to highlight the wider issues and contextualise the theoretical debate. These are (1) a national-level representative survey called *Men in Norway 1988*, (2) a 1993 in-depth interview study called *Men's Life Patterns*, and (3) 'action research' within the research community itself, through an attempt to establish studies of men as a research field. As we shall see, the issues of 'ordinary men' tend to reappear among researchers also. Even more than in the earlier chapters, the discussion is selective, focusing on some main empirical traits highlighting the theoretical issues. More in-depth discussions can be found in the two books I have written or co-written on this subject (Holter 1989a; Holter & Aarseth 1993). The main matter of the current text is not how we perceive men, but what these perceptions are derived from.

## A map of men

I shall start by presenting some main findings from a representative survey that is still unique on the international level.<sup>2</sup> This is the study called *Men in Norway 1988*, designed partly on the basis of the ARFA study (cf. chap. 5) and partly on the basis of a life course approach. Many people contributed to the design of the study, which had been initiated by the Male Role Committee.<sup>3</sup> The life course element was proposed by women's researcher and feminist theorist Hanne Haavind, who hypothesised that childhood and adolescence experience of egalitarian relations to women would create more equality oriented men later in life. On this basis, the survey questions traced men's experiences through childhood, adolescence, work life and adult family life, focusing on their relations to women. It also included questions on men's relations to other men and other people in non-gender respects, especially concerning childhood harassment or mobbing. A number of items that were hypothesised as dependent variables made up the last part of the survey, including some health questions, questions on risk taking and involvement in accidents, and a long list of private and public life gender equality questions.

Although the survey material contained a number of surprises, some main hypotheses concerning differentiation among men were confirmed. What feminists have called 'the problem of men' is in fact divergent traits among different groups of men. Through qualitative multivariate analyses, it was possible to distinguish three '*main themes*'.<sup>4</sup>

(1) Approximately a third of the men was associated with a theme I called 'gender equality willingness', a term intended to express the mixture of attitudes and behaviours involved. In a summary report, I wrote that "the men in this category are in favour of a balanced home and wage work division between husband and wife. They are also positive towards care occupations and towards bringing equality reform politics further. They want equality in practice, not just in words. How large this category is, depends on how strictly the criteria are defined. Only ten percent of the men have fully broken with the traditional division of labour in the home. Perhaps this

gender equality-positive category includes one third of the men in Norway. These are men that would consider taking care leave if they had a child, and take a job in a care occupation if they became unemployed."

In this and other cases, the life course influence hypothesis was broadly confirmed, yet the picture that emerged was seldom clear-cut. Present-day societal, cultural and couple relationship factors, notably the attitudes and resources of the female partner in the relationship, were of larger direct importance than childhood and adolescence experiences.<sup>5</sup>

(2) Another category, reminiscent of the ARFA employees, was characterised as '*time pressers*'. These men were also often themselves objects of time pressure in their jobs. Career jobs were overrepresented in this category, the men often had small children at home, and they often said that they missed having more time for their families and children. The category designation was influenced by women's researchers' focus on 'time binding' and similar issues. Most of the men recognised that their career lives put burdens on their partners, and their level of stress, and to some extent depression, was higher than the average. Their job environments were often characterised by competition (though the study did not venture into details in this area), and also often by a perception that a man's care leave for a new-born baby would not be accepted by his superiors.

A subcategory among the 'time pressers' seemed different from the rest, as if their pressure towards their wives or partners was more of their own making and less a result of their job and other external conditions. These men scored higher than the rest on authoritarianism and traditional masculinity items. – Altogether, the time pressure theme characterised perhaps one third of the men.

(3) The third main category was '*non-egalitarian men*', scoring negatively on various gender equality items, and scoring higher than the rest on sexual aggression- and violence-related items, like being willing to condone men's violence against women. Among the men who scored high on these items,

"Four subcategories of men emerge. The first is mainly characterised by being more traditional [regarding family and gender relations] than normal. (..) These men are older than the others, and have less education. (..) The second category is characterised by a more conservative political attitude than the rest. The link in this case is negative attitudes to women and other weak groups like immigrants. The third category consists of 'players' who do not [openly] condone violence, yet nevertheless use sexual pressure for contact. They take risks also in other areas of life. (..) A fourth category, already described, consists of those who in practice use pressure towards women without supporting it openly in words. – Altogether, this 'sex/violence' syndrome concerns perhaps a third or a quarter of Norwegian men." (Op.cit. 56). Two other main themes emerged among the men who were negative towards women. These men were also in principle negative towards further gender equal status politics, although not towards all concrete proposals. They were also often hostile towards immigrants.

Generally, surveys of equal status issues have shown majority support for many concrete items like equal wages for equal work ever since the 1950s. In the 1980s,

however, pro-equality attitudes became a more central part of official politics and dominant culture, the media, and there are indications that negative opinions were now increasingly seen as suspect or halfway illegitimate. In the 1988 study, only a minority (15-20 percent) of the men expressed a negative attitude towards the many concrete gender equality items included, and most of these were in the 'partially negative', rather than the 'wholly negative' category. Some of the scores on the most celebrated items, like giving care work a higher status, looked a bit like North Korean election results, reflecting the 'correct' answer more than the real situation.

On the other hand, an item where men could answer 'enough is enough' attracted a majority support. This was not a concrete item, but the item discussed in chapter 1 concerning gender equal status politics in general ('likestillingen'). We were surprised that many who supported various concrete equality issues, nevertheless answered affirmatively to the statement that "gender equal status policies have now been carried far enough". The result implied that there were negative associations attached to gender equal status policies that were not covered by the concrete items of the study, besides the aforementioned wide-spread idea that equality was already realised (the pattern that was found also in the *Equity 1994* study, among women as well as men). If the latter study showed signs of a 'problematisation' of what gender equality should be about, what can be gleaned from the 1988 study seems better characterised as 'vague uneasiness'.

In sum, the 1988 study gave a broad if partially diffuse picture of three main categories of men in Norway, perhaps of fairly equal size, consisting of pro-egalitarian men, a middle category, and a third category of men who were negative to women and equality issues. Men in the first and second category often fitted Lars Jalmert's (1984) portrait of the '*in principle*' men – who declare their support for equality in principle, yet are passive or resistant in practice. Yet 'society' especially in the form of job demands did emerge as one main factor, along with a time pressure that was not just of the men's own making.

The media coverage of the study, and especially the fact that large proportions of men supported concrete equality measures, is of some interest in the present context. In one major Norwegian tabloid a few of the results were published under the headline, in 'war fonts' on the front page, "*Norwegian men are bluffing*", followed by interviews with feminists who were given this cue line by the paper and mostly supported it. Morale: since everyone knows that men are the barrier against women's liberation, something must be wrong with a survey saying perhaps they are not.<sup>6</sup> Once more a background agreement emerged behind the debate. The media were generally negative towards what they conceived as hard-line feminism, yet at this point, regarding men as 'even worse', one could all agree, with the interesting implication that perhaps the 'man-hating' was not, after all, a feminist issue. Or that there is a deeper-level cultural trait that says men *should* see themselves as bad, suspect, not really trustworthy whenever they venture into women's terrain.

Nevertheless the study did establish a movement in that direction, with the three main groups mentioned: firstly, men who tried to support women, doing something in practice also, though less than in words; secondly, men who would like to give this support, but for various reasons, often connected to their job, their lack of conviction, or both, did not do so, and finally men who did not give this support. In Norway and



the rest of Scandinavia, there may be more men on the pro-egalitarian side than in other regions, yet at this point also, studies of actions and practices tend to de-emphasise the differences, compared to what attitude studies would make us expect (Sandqvist, K 1987).

In the book from the 1988 study, I also attempted to place the Norwegian trends on an international map, using international surveys and cross-cultural studies. Together, this material gave a picture of three main Western cultural patterns relating to gender equality.

(1) One pattern, at the 'high degree of equality' end of the scale, was associated with the Scandinavian and Nordic region, often with Sweden in the lead, followed closely by Norway, Denmark, Iceland, rather closely placed as one group, with Finland a bit behind.

(2) A second, intermediate pattern associated especially with the US and the UK, with some traits in common with the first group, and some with the less-egalitarian countries in the third group. The Netherlands, Belgium and France, the latter lagging behind, also belonged to the second group.

(3) Interestingly, the old 'axis' powers of the World War II dominated the third group (Germany, Italy), as well as the other Mediterranean countries (Spain, Portugal).

Many gender equality measures may yield results that differ from this tripartite model, which is based mainly on cultural items.<sup>7</sup> It is more diffuse and perhaps subjective than the one given of men in Norway, yet it does have a certain logic, and there is no doubting that real differences exist, perhaps especially between the Scandinavian region and the rest. In the European continental and central countries the bonds of authority were historically more developed and more vertical than in the northern periphery, creating a culture that was also more patriarchal. Even if welfare arrangements and other gender-relevant issues may in fact be more similar across the three groups than is often believed, historical and cultural differences persist, and they contribute to the gap that exists not only in politics but also in family life and informal relations.

Did the results support the hypothesis that egalitarian relations to women earlier in life create more equality-oriented men? The answer was a partial yes, though not as clearly as might have been expected. Another pattern, consisting of men's experiences with other men, also emerged, sometimes rivalling the former explanatory path.

We know that mobbing and other group victimisation processes among children and adolescents usually have a major aspect of same-sex ranking (Roland, E 1987). In our case, we found that having been a victim of mobbing in childhood or adolescence was a stronger predictor of a man's willingness to condone violence against women than any other single variable in the study! Other results pointed in the same direction: men's experiences with other men, not least their childhood relations to their fathers, were as important as their relations to women for predicting later orientation. These results, and especially the indication that violence between men may be 'translated' to violence against women, support a theoretical view in which the structure of oppression of women is connected to the structure of oppression between men.



It should also be noted that all kinds of presumably egalitarian experiences with figures of the other sex earlier in life do not yield egalitarian results later. Today, the favouring of mothers in disputes over children in divorce cases is often defended in terms of equality. Yet in this study, a '*boomerang effect*' emerged among the sons, as has been hypothesised in some works on father absence. Men who had experienced divorce in their childhood often seemed to have taken their father's side, or developed an idealised picture of him, while staying with their mother, who were probably often negative towards their ex-spouses. These men were quite dramatically over-represented on the right-wing side of the political scale. They also gave less support to equal status issues and were more often hostile towards immigrants than other men. Among those who had experienced divorce in their childhood, no less than *a half* were supporters of the right-wing, immigration- and feminist-hostile Progress party (Fremskrittspartiet), which at the time attracted a bit less than a fifth of men's votes in general! The political rhetoric of the party, mainly on the theme of freeing the individual from state collective bureaucracy and avoid immigrant competition, seems to have fitted rather well with these men's private life experiences, possibly due to a similarly perceived looming mother-being in childhood. Whatever else, this result clearly indicates that gender politics do have some sharp teeth biting into 'official' politics.

## Going inside

Tore, young father:

"I received very little care and love from my parents, especially my father. However I am a very loving person, very loving with my kids. I use much time with them, and it gives me enormous satisfaction. I am not very, you know, typical masculine or male role-like. (...) Why I am like that, I do not know, but when you have not received any care or love, you develop a need for it."

Mads, young father:

"- Do you think men in the old days led a better life?

- Yes, no doubt! (Laughs). It must have been a luxurious life indeed. They came home to the dinner waiting, got the paper in their lap and could just lie there on the sofa the rest of the evening. A luxury life quite out of this world!

- Perhaps they also missed something?

- Oh yes. – No, seriously, I would not have changed places with them. I see this life as a challenge."

These are quotations from the interviews in the *Men's Life Patterns* study (1993), a qualitative project designed for exploring some of the main areas uncovered by the *Men in Norway 1988* survey. While the 1988 survey brought out some of the width and variety among men, this was an in-depth interview study with a small sample of men who belonged to the most advanced third of the survey categories. We wanted to know more about the men who were not only egalitarian 'in principle', but also in

practice by taking a main part of the work related to home and children.<sup>8</sup> The interviews with the 28 participants were loosely structured life course interviews, focused on the men's present participation in the home compared to the conditions in their family of origin.

As is often the case, the study did not develop quite as planned, since one of our first questions uncovered themes that were more important and emotional than we had expected. We had rather innocently formulated a question about the man's childhood experiences of his father, compared to his own fatherhood experience today, and we had also agreed on a free associations approach. For many men, this was like uncovering a wound, as Bly (1992) says, a 'father wound', one that we could not pass over, and so the first interview often remained on that subject.

The study was re-adjusted according to this new, emerging terrain, for we soon realised that the men were not just addressing personal issues but were also expressing their gender views and informal gender politics. Starting with the father, and staying there for quite some time, emerged as a source further information. This family history and partially psychodynamic angle undoubtedly brought us further than we would have come if we had stuck to the 'who does the dishes' couple negotiation framework. We did not discover a main discrepancy between the men's self-portrait and those of the women close to them, even if there were variations in nuance and explanation of various traits, and also a variation in the consistency of household labour reports which fitted the picture given earlier. The 'report inconsistency' was smaller regarding visible and distinct work tasks, and larger regarding less distinct tasks and especially the time used with the children.

A third of the men in the study expressed strong hostility when describing their father in childhood, and an additional third displayed similar sentiments, although not as strong, and in a more mixed context. The two main accusations against the father concerned his absence and his controlling behaviour when present. A number of studies, in the US especially (e.g. Ehrenreich, B 1983), have given similar results; we noted that the proportion giving a critical view of their father increased with the depth of the interview, as the man came to know the interviewers better. This is probably the main reason why it was higher in this study than in the 1988 survey.

"I have never been angry at my father", one of the men reflected; "I have never been close enough to him to be able to be angry." Disappearance often masked sorrow and anger.

The 'clinical' aspect of this material was often overt, and we were also witnessing a discourse that did, indeed, address 'masculinities'. Often, there was a double edge to the negative statements regarding the father: these statements also served to put the man himself in a more positive light. There was seldom any reason to disbelieve what the men said of their childhood (a line of approach that anyway has problems, since the subjective experience itself is of main importance); yet there was also a larger 'sociological' message concerning a shift in the definition of masculinity. The father was portrayed as *socially incompetent*, out of touch with his feelings, and emotionally immature; what these men wanted instead was to master the home sphere and the emotional side of life as well as the career and instrumental side.

As noted it is doubtful that the men had experienced especially bad fathers, compared to the average Norwegian man; we had several indications to the contrary. What characterised them, instead, was a more 'feminine' way of interpreting the father image, a trait I shall return to shortly. It seems that the model suggested by Haavind was actually more relevant for interpreting the results in this study than those of the 1988 survey. If men experience a negative father relationship in childhood, it may, *on certain conditions*, be turned into a resource in their own remaking of fatherhood, when they themselves become fathers. For some of the men, a close relationship to the mother was important, but the attitude of the wife or partner and many other circumstances also seems to have contributed, as was the impression from the survey.

As we added our own findings to those of other studies, what emerged was what is usually called an 'institutional crisis'. These men had indeed experienced more than a problematical childhood in purely personal terms. They had also experienced a 'type of father' who was in the process of becoming a social misfit, who increasingly seemed closed off to the changing times. The sons told of a wider 'sociological' change which gradually had left their fathers' behind.

Two traits were especially linked to this crisis of traditional fatherhood. One was a breakdown of what psychologist Per Are Løkke calls the *distance principle* of male socialisation, a rule that says "you have to manage on your own" and "if you do, I shall respect you". At this point, the *exchange* aspects of family relations reemerge; exchange logic with its tendential anonymity and indifference is antithetical to the distance principle. The latter presupposes a meaningful, personal relationship which is sustained over time and distance; exchange logic tends to undermine it. A feeling of anonymity was expressed in many forms by the men, with the common theme that "my father did not really know *me*, as a person, nor did I know him". What the sons did not understand was "why mother endured it". This was before the rising divorce rate really hit Norway, and it may be interpreted as parts of the 'internal' family conditions that prepared the ground for the subsequent development.

A second and related theme was a breakdown of the 'redistributive logic' traditionally associated with the father. In this respect, our material, covering childhood in the 1960s, should be seen as a snapshot of a wider movement. The father's diminishing family role and the breakdown of fatherly authority in the 20th. century have been the subject of a prolonged debate, and I shall not go into it here (cf. Holter & Aarseth 1993, and recently Gillis, J 1995). Our material illustrates how this process was still going on in the 1960s, with the result that mother, alone, more and more emerged as the one source of 'family symbolic redistribution'.

The statement "*I had to ask my mother in order to find out how my father was*" is typical of these trends. As in earlier studies, the woman emerged as a kind of family 'communications central', the one representing the 'us-ness' of the family. If the young fathers wanted to become "family men", it should be seen in a larger perspective where the preceding generations of fathers had, increasingly, removed themselves or been pushed out of it, and had instead become defined almost solely in non-family terms. A father, according to dominant 1950s and 1960s ideology, was a breadwinner, who should in fact celebrate his incompetence vis-à-vis children, since this, according to the functionalist view of the day, meant a better "complementary" family role specialisation, increasing the family's total welfare and success chances. The men's

complaints against their fathers, therefore, were not only the 'feminine' complaints of lacking emotional openness. Especially among working class men there was also the complaint that the father did not teach them his skills and did not help them become men by being present as a positive learning model.

In a paradoxical sense, these men who were often concerned about moving away from the 'one-sidedness' and 'social incompetence' of their fathers, were also *widening* the theme of masculinity. This is an important point for the gender system discussion later. It is a paradox, since these men's fathers, in their eyes, were 'more' men than they were – yet in a narrow, traditional sense. So if the young fathers did not want to be 'stereotypically masculine', they *did* use the gender framework in a way that both seemed more *active*, trying to reconstruct masculinity, and *broader* than that of their fathers. Their fathers might be described as 'job persons' while they were also 'home persons'. While 'gender' was peripheral in the older generation's mind, it was a main division line among the young men. Although we did not interview the older generation, I am not in doubt that *social class* would have been a more important framework for them. At that point, the younger men's portraits of their fathers fit well with the material that exists on the self-consciousness of the older generation, i.e. men born in the 1920s and 1930s.

The *limits* of the younger, pro-egalitarian men's engagement, in practical terms in the home labour division, emerged in three main areas. One was the man's own attitudes, which sometimes made him describe his domestic care role as a tourist role. Another was his work life and career engagements, often connected to the first. The third factor may be related to the tendencies towards 'traditionality' and anti-homogenisation found in the *Equity 1994* survey. In some cases, the men expressed the opinion that their partner and her female friends were more traditionally minded than they themselves were. These stories often enhanced the 'conservative' role of feminine gift relationships, discussed in the last chapter.

The men's involvement in the home often seemed primarily dependent on a tacit, underlying relationship of understanding – and conflicting definitions of reality. As a whole, the couple relationship could often be described as shifting in the terrain between gift and exchange reciprocity which I have described already, and it also included aspects (especially external relations to the parents and children of the couple) of a more overt redistributive character. Parent figures were important at a symbolical level, as points of departure for the individuals' own life courses, also when the parents were deceased or not present in the vicinity of the new family. Therefore, the symbolical matrix that was used to interpret concrete actions and decisions often included six people rather than two – the two partners plus four parent figures. For example, some of the women felt that whereas they had managed to oppose their mothers in their youth, selecting untraditional occupations and/or men, there were also sociopsychological costs that made this opposition difficult to maintain. A sacrifice strategy among the mothers was sometimes mentioned in this context.

Throughout this varied terrain, a sense of *female prerogatives* relating to care, love, children and reproduction emerged, privileges that might not count for much in the national budget, yet were nevertheless often hard-edged and real in the personal family experience. While men often stuck to the masculine rule that says a man

should never perceive himself as dominated by women, the women often gave sharp pictures of other women's personal power. These tendencies appear also in other studies. The feminine spheres of influence co-existed with informal masculine prerogatives, with the overall balance sometimes in the man's favour, sometimes in the woman's. We did not attempt to measure this; instead we focused on qualitative experiences. The men seldom presented being dominated by women as a topic of concern, but they often indicated that their own sphere of 'traditional' job-related influence was smaller than normal among men. They were 'soft' in this sense, and this gap was often a background issue in their feelings of awkwardness or distance towards their home care engagement. In general, the interviews with women as well as men supported the triadic model presented in the last chapter: two opposed influence spheres emerged, with the important analytical consequence that issues of patriarchal and gender domination must be addressed *through* this halfway symmetrical layer where the power of the one exists together with the counter-power of the other.

These spheres of influence can be compared to the dyadic level of negotiation in the partner selection and couple formation. They can also be seen as more extensive 'scripts' created as the relationship moved towards sharing. Inner dialogues with parental figures now increasingly became important, all the more so when the couple also became practically dependent on their parents (almost only the mothers) for help with the small children. Also, material and financial help played a role for many couples.<sup>9</sup>

On the basis of a recent Danish study of men similar to those in the present study, Søren Carlsen (1995:76) has argued that:

"An often-found trait concerning these men is that even if their work was important for them, as it was for the other men interviewed, their identity was nevertheless not so totally dependent on their work role. It is not so surprising, therefore, that these were the first in their work place to use their right to care leave. (...) [They emerge as] 'strong men' who, independently of the kind of [work] environment they are part of, will find a way to spend time together with their children."

Based on the *Men's Life Patterns* study, Helene Aarseth (1995:53) developed a typology of young, participative fathers which is relevant in this context as a further mapping of the 'somewhat' equality-oriented men discussed above. Discussing men's ways of legitimising the gap between equality ideals and actual practices, she distinguishes four common figures or ideal types. These are (1) 'the strategic man' who meets the wife or female partner's demands, but no more than is necessary in order to avoid conflicts; (2) 'the [conflict] avoiding man' who resembles Jalmert's 'in principle' man, saying yes but meaning no; and, further, (3) the 'the silent man' and (4) 'the lazy man'. The last two types "in somewhat different ways lack the means to express their subjectivity within the family".<sup>10</sup> They may also be interpreted as versions of one type, a peripheral man.

Men's positions in the family were dependent on their 'relations work' in a wide sense, including their inner dialogues with their partners, their children, their parents, their friends and their work superiors and colleagues. Parental figures became important on a personal level also as symbols of some of the attempted forms of change. What was

said earlier about current gender circumstances rearranging socialisation experiences is relevant here. The men were clearly engaged in a present-day 'gender-political' discourse, and they used parental figures accordingly. They often emphasised their fathers' lacks compared to their own achievements. Yet we had no reason to disbelieve their main childhood memories or the collective portrait they created of a father who was either absent or present in negative ways. These memories clearly had a real background, cutting through present-day considerations.

## Men's 'relations work'

Through their symbolic parental discourse, the equality-oriented men in the study did in fact reestablish some of the troublesome, depressive, alienative and sometimes traumatic experiences many of them linked to their fathers, even as they tried to move beyond such traits. The 'repeat play' element was much more in evidence among the subgroup of men with violence problems than among the others. Like the dynamics of women's gift opposition described in the last chapter, the equality-oriented men's generational opposition was characterised by a change of terrain, of terms of debate.

The men's opposition to their fathers also allowed further mapping of men's 'relations work'. This concept may be defined as the informal reproductive or human resource-oriented activity that is specifically oriented towards the relationship itself. This view does not imply that social relations are seen as work products. I disagree with Ulrike Prokop's (1978) thesis that women (through 'relations work') *create* the relations of production in society. The latter means power relations, and the worker is not the one who makes them. Neither does women's family work create the family in this sense. If we make social relations in general into work products, we *reify* social life. Still, institutions like the family must be *maintained* through activities, and in this more concrete and restricted sense, the concept of relations work is useful.<sup>11</sup>

Mens' relations work could be further outlined, focusing on their close and personal relations, and by using their relation to their father as point of departure. The 'good father' image in the interviews was important in this context.

This image had one main trait in common; the father was not indifferent. In the negative image, on the other hand, the father was partly indifferent, partly selfish and authoritarian. As sons, the men had commonly experienced their fathers in some more positive settings, though often as exceptions to the negative rule.

Together with closeness and involvement, there was also another main trait of these settings: a '*good distance*' as well as closeness, meaning that the son felt that his father cared for him, loved him or respected him. These good distances may be interpreted as bridges over divides that were already there, a kind of gap.

This potentially traumatic aspect often seemed connected to an externalisation or a threat of annihilation. Although some of the contours of this early relationship resemble the Freudian oedipal account, it may also be interpreted in other ways. It is significant that 'early' memories here also meant general memories, or even a fully abstract sense of what 'father' was about, notably different from 'mother'. Like Barbara Ehrenreich (1983) we were often struck by the *sociological similarity* in the heart of

very personal accounts of childhood. While the mother was often described in relational terms, the father was demarcated, individuated. If *she* was the background, or in Aarseth's term the emotional 'background carpet', *he* was the figure. A sense of *loss* emerged in this configuration of fatherhood. In the men's many statements about not really knowing one's father as a person, there was the implication that one *had* known him once, or *could* do so, as if something had been removed, and a distance inserted instead. As mentioned earlier, the archaic and the abstract is often linked in gender contexts, and this is relevant here also; 'early' has a sense of 'really', 'at the bottom of things'.

The interviews gave many indications that a sense of *abstract masculinity* was in fact involved here. The men's statements could be quite overt in this regard: I grew up to know my father as a *man*, but what I really would have liked was to know him as a *person* beneath that level. One may connect various versions of phallic competition, sexual hostility or other psychodynamic traits to this shift from the personal to the masculine, yet the interviews did not yield much evidence in that direction. Besides the theoretical problems of Freudian accounts, it may be argued that they mainly represent a detour from the main gender-related issue, which offers a more straightforward path of interpretation. In remarkably similar ways, the men told of a meeting with another person whose masculinity meant *not being there for others*, not as a specific trait connected to a concrete form of masculinity, but as a general trait of maleness, the social position of being a man. The mother, on the other hand, very much was *there* for others, but not for herself, which made her diffuse and background-like.

These 'archaic' notions of being a man and a woman can be interpreted not only in their childhood context, but as a general, underlying pattern of gender interaction, which was brought more clearly into light by focusing on childhood memories. It comes as no surprise on this background that *good memories* of the mother often concerned her being *for herself*, and thus also distinct for others, while those of the father concerned his being *for others*. As the more distinct person, the father often stood for independence and freedom compared to the mother. In the cold memories this was a *freedom from*, a detachment from others, and what made some memories warmer and more positive was that the son had instead participated in the father's *freedom to*, a freedom of being together based on mutual respect.

The 'good father' image in a sense made up for the father being a man in the first place. I highlight a background pattern was of major importance even if hard to pinpoint. It concerned a feeling of distance, which was what the men wanted to overcome in their relations to their own children. The good memories often seemed to make some of the pain connected to the father relation go away.

Once more I believe this is a pattern that lies in the background of interaction among men generally. Men may say of each other that 'he is OK *after all*', and there is an edge to such statements, connected to the annihilative aspect of masculinity, and so there may even be some amazement when the other man is in fact not out to get you. The distance principle is also a bridging principle in human terms, and it was precisely this lack of a bridge that was mourned among the men with few positive memories of their fathers, and especially among the men with violent fathers. In the latter cases, the annihilative side was no longer a subdued, abstract, background

matter, but something that had taken very concrete forms, indifference turning to calculated aggression and violence.

Although working class men were underrepresented in the sample, we noted some main traits that corresponded with findings from other studies (e.g. Holter, H et.al. 1976). Working class men put more emphasis on their fathers as concrete learning models, middle class men more on abstract individuation models, and therefore their feelings of distance and loss were also different. Working class men often seemed more emotionally aware in their activities, for example together with their children, yet their complaints against their fathers were focused on his not learning them instrumental skills, including traditional male tasks 'how to be a man' in a more general sense. Some of these men's feelings of being underdogs in the societal hierarchy were probably projected and conceived as the lacks of their fathers. Middle class men were often more emotional in their vocabulary, but more instrumental in their actions. They could rationalise their being away from the children in terms of "quality time". Keeping the children in the centre of attention was often difficult, when they were together; instead their told of how their thoughts strayed to their jobs or careers instead. Working class men described the *class* aspects of their lives in remarkably gender-like terms, even if gender words were not used: they felt like losers on the large 'instrumentality scale' of society, and presented their superiors and other men upwards in the hierarchy as more instrumental than they themselves were.

It is probably indicative of the 1990s climate that the sense of working class solidarity was less pronounced than the feeling of not having succeeded in society as one should have done. This individualising framework made the gender-like elements more overt. Being a loser meant being too expressive, not being instrumental and calculative enough. In this light, the traditional working class solidarity and defensive forms of unity take on a new hue – as 'masculinistic' countermeasures against positions that, one by one, are experienced by the individual as feminine-like, or exposed also in this sense.

The men's relations work towards their fathers had several typical distinct stages. The following outline concerns the majority who had experienced a negative and/or distant father relationship.

The first stage was characterised by latent or subdued conflict. The men experienced emptiness rather than sorrow or anger. Some men told of unsuccessful attempts to improve the relationship in their youth. Later they had given up. This silence was often broken when the men learned that they themselves would become fathers.

It was followed by a second 'feminising' stage. The men turned to the 'local expertise'. They asked their mothers or partners about their fathers, and the learned from the women's perspective. They also often used the women's vocabulary, including feminist terms.

A third stage seemed to involve greater independence on this new basis and more reliance on one's own sense of judgement. The men were often 'strong' in this sense (cf. Carlsen above), including their ability to disagree with women's judgement in constructive ways. Yet we did not find any distinct development pattern at this point;



this was uncharted territory. Some men had given up once more, telling us how they had tried to reestablish contact with their fathers without success.

As can be seen, the *Men's Life Patterns* study did not support a simple picture of men as 'barriers' against equality and women as 'movers'. Couples moved towards greater or lesser equality due to more complex circumstances, and changes in both directions could be initiated by the woman as well as the man. These changes were not directly linked to the marriage types discussed in the last chapter; they occurred throughout. Nor were they directly linked to reciprocity changes. One main pattern can be identified: when couples moved in a traditional direction, the difference between *her* gift orientation and *his* exchange orientation usually became more pronounced. The relationship became more 'complementary' also in this sense, and the usual reason for couples turning back was an uneasiness, a vague feeling of loss, on both sides. They had tried unorthodox solutions, for example after the birth of their first child; now, with the second one, they wanted to do things in the traditional manner. This backwards motion could be as strong among the women as among the men, and in both cases it was related to a perceived insecurity, a feeling of not being a 'real' man or woman. This was not stated in so many words, but rather through an 'operative index' of sphere-related capacity: men were concerned with a status fall in the job sphere, women with status insecurity in the home sphere.

Two traits in the material from the men with violence problems shall be mentioned especially, since they are of some theoretical significance in the present context. They are also indicated by many other studies. One trait concerned an authoritarian family background. In these men's father portraits, we recognised the same crisis of fatherhood discussed above, yet brought further in terms of brutality and violence. Indifference had been translated to violence. Even if many concrete circumstances were different from the 'normal' childhoods, the main sociological fact was a common tendency that varied in degree.

The other trait, once more a general pattern in extreme forms, concerned jealousy. Most of the violence we heard of occurred in situations where the man felt desperately jealous of his partner. According to other literature and to therapists we interviewed during the project, this is a common pattern among men with violence problems.<sup>12</sup> Although jealousy may have many sources, it is often linked to 'sex objectification' or gender commodity patterns. We may even recognise the two main stages in the commodity cycle, the property and the exchange stage. One subtype of violent men, also found in the literature on rape and sexual abuse, is characterised by taking the asymmetrical property pattern literally, and acting on that basis. The woman is seen as a part of the man's sphere of property, and there is an anxiety that the property may be lost or conquered by another man. Another subtype resembles the exchange pattern, once more in an extreme form, so that transgression or abuse is experienced as a mutual exchange (Sætre, M 1989; Ringheim, G 1987). There can be no doubt that the 'normal' gender commodity patterns are in the background of much jealousy-related violence, which in turn accounts for a major part of the violence against women. Indirectly, our study indicated some problems with a 'take responsibility for violence' strategy that focuses exclusively on the violence and on the men themselves, as opposed to a broader strategy where the gender and partnership context surrounding it, including the jealousy element, is brought more into focus. These may also be seen as stages; ending the violence is a first stage, working through the jealousy a second.

Yet beyond all this human repair work, there is the question of a system that recreates very predictable forms of deviancy.

## Research networking

One important indirect consequence of the Male Role committee in Norway was the creation of an informal environment for studies of men. In 1989, I initiated a more formal organisation in the field, *The Norwegian Network for Studies of Men*. In many ways, this initiative was successful and positive, while new problems also emerged, and some experiences that are relevant in the present perspective are discussed here.

The networking idea soon spread to other Nordic countries, and at the moment, similar networks exist in Denmark, Sweden and Finland, as well as a contact group in Iceland, with some co-operation among the five. At the same time, universities and other academic institutions are gradually showing signs of putting more effort into the area. Thus the situation within the new field of studies of men has improved somewhat over the last decade, even if the research activity still has a very small volume. From 1990, The Norwegian Network has held regular seminars and arranged some larger conferences in co-operation with the Norwegian social science council, women's research centres, and others. Like the Swedish and Danish networks, it also publishes a more or less regular newsletter.

An international association for studies of men (IASOM) was started in 1993 on the initiative of members from the Norwegian Network and the US Men's Studies Association, which is part of the US National Organisation of Men Against Sexism (NOMAS). Today, IASOM has support from researchers in some twenty countries, and approximately 70 individual members plus 200 contacts besides affiliated networks and groups. IASOM also publishes its own newsletter. It is noteworthy that IASOM has received international support not only from the still quite small group of researchers in the field, but also from groups and individuals who recognise the need for initiative and attention in this area. They include therapists' organisations in South America, trade unions in Italy, men who organise community networks in New Zealand, German men's counselling centres and feminists who heard about the organisation at the Beijing Women's Conference – to mention some.

For a grass roots initiative without governmental funding, this list of results is quite impressive, reflecting an emerging understanding that research on men as men is an important field for development. The main basis of the networking has been the free-time activities of researchers, students and therapists in the field, while the institutional and financial basis is still narrow.

If one looks at social science publishing like the material in *Sociofile*, the number of papers classified under headings like 'masculinities' or 'studies of men' is still tiny, even if it is growing. Yet the number of papers that include some *discussion* intended to make the reader understand that the writer has some awareness of 'men' as a topic on its own, is much larger. The fact that such discussions are still often hidden away in the footnotes is not so surprising.

On the international level, the emergence of men and masculinities as a theme for research is not only or mainly an effect of studies of men, but primarily of feminism and women's studies. Yet the former has had a 'signal effect' on its own, with a larger message that men are worth researching *as men*, and that research paradigms that in fact refer to men, yet do not include this point of view, may be narrow, superficial, or misleading.

A new field involves some typical problems, which may be enhanced by lack of institutional and financial support. For those who have worked with the issues for a while, the networking may sometimes be associated with a feeling of "starting all over again" and problems of "good will and cross-disciplinary amateurism". The networks have been cross-disciplinary and only loosely organised, so people usually come and go to specific topical seminars. This situation is well known in gender studies generally; it is not only the complexity of the theme itself that leads to much reinventing of wheels. A lack of *core long-term research effort* is one main reason for this situation, especially in the studies of men field. It is indicative of the situation that even in 1996 there are probably no more than a handful has time and money to concentrate exclusively on developing research in the field. Also, the cross-disciplinary emphasis creates many kinds of translation problems with the result that much time is used just in order to explain to people from other disciplines what is at all going on, or the basic meaning of what one tries to say. What is gained in width may be lost in terms of depth.

*Identifying and limiting the field.* At the moment, the Nordic networks are in the process of solving some of these problems, with more emphasis on specialised seminars, postgraduate training, and other remedies. On a general level, strategies for theory and method development are central, and a starting point has been to identify some common 'theory themes'. This is important also as counter-dote for a typical first realisation that 'studies of men' apply to just about anything in society, or that just about anything is relevant, which in practice may soon turn into its opposite, i.e. that the field becomes too wide.

Two main stages may be outlined in this 'identification process'. The first is a *men's private lives* phase, where studies and discussions concentrate on areas where everyone 'knows' that men's behaviour *as men* is important. Often, these are areas that feminist and women's studies have focused on, like rape and private violence. In general, men's private life becomes the main topic. For good reasons, this approach has been criticised as being too narrow. Men are not only private beings, and their public life and professional behaviour are important also.

A new and wider orientation is therefore needed, and this has emerged over the last years primarily connected to the concept of *masculinities*, usually meaning a hierarchical organisation of masculine identities and behaviours.<sup>13</sup> Since this approach is questioned in the present text, it should be pointed out that there are some very good reasons why it has gained ground. More than anything else, it has defined a *central topic of concern*, which is wide enough to include cross-disciplinary efforts, yet not so unlimited or hazy that it becomes useless. Secondly, masculinities analysis opens the way for addressing men's role in the oppression of women, leading to power and exploitation analysis. Thirdly, it allows analysis of power differences also *among*

men, and thereby leads to a much-needed distinction between quite dissimilar tendencies among men.

## The masculinities problem

Did the survey and the in-depth study outlined above indicate that masculinity was a basic issue among men, concerning their equal status-related behaviours and orientations? This depends on how masculinity is defined. We may start with an everyday life definition that says that masculinity involves a man's awareness of himself as a man and behaviour and experience in that context.

On that level, the answer is not an unqualified 'yes'. Although the survey did not include a full-range attempt to measure masculine identity, a number of related items were included, and these were often only weakly related to concrete equality-related behaviour and attitude items. In other words, a man's masculinity, at least on this everyday level of definition, did not emerge as a main causal factor behind his equality-related position. What emerged, instead, was a *plurality* of statuses, positions and roles that all had some impact. Here it should be emphasised that the broad and partly exploratory character of the survey did not only lead to less 'depth' than we would have liked; it also gave a picture of men that was *wider* than the one often given in men's studies. As we saw, men's 'masculine' behaviours, or their experiences as men or boys, stretched into other areas of behaviour, including party politics. At other times, as in the case of mobbing, a man's masculinity might only be rather peripherally related to his actual acceptance of violence against women. An overall attempt to classify men on a scale from traditional to more androgynous masculinity did imply some independent role of gender identity, yet it did *not* emerge as the main predictor of violence acceptance and other equality-related items.

As I was working with these aspects of the material, I was reminded of voices from men in subcultures that do not quite fit in with the modernised 'egalitarian' urban middle class discourse, from fishermen to truck drivers, men saying that even if *our* values are different from *yours*, it does not mean we oppress women, while you do not. I was also reminded of a similar lesson, mentioned in relation to the commuter studies, showing that 'backwards' rural family patterns are not necessarily more unequal than the urban middle class pattern.

The same ambiguity emerged in the life pattern study, now from the inside of the presumably non-hegemonic, equality-oriented masculinity. These men's masculinity did not always correlate with their actual behaviour, and in many cases, they were both equality-oriented *and* highly career-oriented. They were 'modernisers' in both camps, in work life as well as the home. They were also often full of words. On the other hand, some of the more silent men, with a more traditional masculine identity, often seemed to be more steady supports for women on a practical level.

These traits all raise questions regarding the masculinities paradigm. Although many researchers use masculinities in the sense of "men's actions and experiences in a gender or equal status perspective", the concept also has a quite different meaning, resembling "life styles". Some have argued that the masculinities concept is too broad to be useful, which in my view is not necessarily the case.

The main problem may be stated in more precise terms (further defined in chapter 7): masculinities concern *gender signification* and not necessarily *patriarchal stratification*. If the latter is the real topic of inquiry, the problem is whether the masculinities concept is a reliable indicator, or at least a good path of approach. Does the masculinities concept differentiate men on the equality/oppression dimension, or is it partly misleading, for example by distinguishing between life styles instead?

Even if the masculinity repertoire is *connected* to men's equality position, we have not yet seen much evidence that this link is direct and strong.<sup>14</sup> The studies just discussed instead imply that it is moderate or weak; various forms of oppression of women can probably be found across masculinity borders. In this light, using masculinities as the main framework of interpretation becomes problematical. Another problem also emerges. Are men always to be interpreted on the basis of masculinity, and if not, why not; where do we draw the border?<sup>15</sup>

In many masculinities approaches, the question of gender signification, whether gender is relevant or not, is mixed with the question of stratification. I shall later present some reasons why this may not be a good strategy, even if it has been dominant in feminist theory. The problem may be briefly stated: either 'masculinity' means a man's actions as a man, or it means his actions in terms of their consequences for women and gender equality. The first is the gender frame of reference, or the signification meaning of masculinity. The second is the stratification meaning. In order to make the masculinities concept operational as a stratification concept, it has to be stretched, and take on the additional meaning of "what men do that helps, or hinders, equality". This is clearly something else than "what men do specifically as men"; it may be related, but it is not the same.

According to the gender epistemologies discussed earlier (chapter 4), men tend to neutralise gender, and shift gender questions back into a series of other questions, while women tend to make gender into the key issue leading to other matters. This neutralising mechanism is not what is proposed here. I must anticipate some of the later argumentation.

In contemporary society, women know more of gender, men more of patriarchy, or at least some very important 'other sides' to patriarchy. The latter is due to men's societal position, being more in the middle of things as regards patriarchal organisation. Yet this knowledge is in many ways *subdued* in current studies of men, not simply because men are ambivalent and have some vested interests in *not* seeing what they are in the middle of – but also because feminist epistemologies are used. The 'derived subject' issue reappears on this level. Some argue that men's studies should drop their pro-feminist connection in order to see men in their 'true stature', which is not my line at all; my point concerns understanding *more* of patriarchy, not less of it. Men do not only have *problems* understanding what patriarchy is about, but also some potential *advantages*, if those problems are solved. 'Advantage' here means being able to *contribute* to solving what is, in the end, a common problem.

This is my background for questioning the masculinities approach, since it copies the main feminist path to patriarchy. It goes *through* gender, through 'the one leading to the series', using gender as *key hole* for glimpsing the societal organisation creating inequality. In a sense one is on the outside looking in. Yet in reality men are often on

the inside, more or less 'below' or 'above' in patriarchal terms, but not outside. In this perspective, developing new ways of interpreting men's experiences becomes a matter of major importance.

In practice, the 'derived epistemologies' in men's studies do not stay 'derived', as shall be shown in more detail later. They tend to develop in their own ways. Once more I believe the main background reason for this change is the fact that men's positions differ from women's – *also* in those respects where most men are subordinates in patriarchal arrangements. Although this is still mainly a latent development, one issue has already become fairly clear, namely the tendency in studies of men to focus on relations of dominance *between men*. This may perhaps seem peripheral from some gender points of view, but it is highly significant if we are to understand patriarchy.

There is also much historical evidence in this area that can only be mentioned here. In modern history, a common rule appears. Most men, including male social researchers, have either been uninterested or negative towards feminism. However, *when* men have developed pro-feminist views, their analyses have often been (a) more radical than women's and (b) focused on *other sides* of patriarchy than those emphasised by women. One major and overlooked European example may be noted. This is Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel, whose *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber* (On the bourgeois improvement of the women) was published in 1793. Hippel not only protested against the exclusion of women from citizenship, he also tried to uncover patriarchal strategy, arguing that "man creates needs and then asserts that it is precisely those needs which make male dominance essential". This goes beyond, for example, Mary Woolstonecraft's plea for (male) education of women.

"Hippel's essay was not well received when it was published, in fact it was so radical and so ahead of its time that even a century later, a strong feminist movement in Germany did not really know how to handle such an absolute demand for total equality and preferred the more innocuous and moderate tract by John Stuart Mills." (Carlebach, J 1978:126-7).

## Men as dislocated subjects

As discussed earlier, the *Equity 1994* survey confirmed a pattern often found in qualitative studies: men become problematical *as* masculine, or as gender in an abstract sense. Women were more favourable towards their husbands or partners than towards men in general. This finding can be connected to the gender epistemologies discussed previously (chap. 3), since the one 'leading to the series' is, precisely, one's own man, the 'right one'. It also has other implications specifically concerning men.

Feminist theories have for long focused on the 'dislocation' of the feminine subject – sometimes in a manner that gives the impression that the man's subjectivity is simply *there*, given and granted for all times. I believe that is very far from the truth. The dislocation of the subject is not only a matter on women's side of the gender line, it happens among men also, although in other and less well recognised forms. The gender value forms analysis gives reasons to believe that these two are deeply interconnected, with the gendered self-formulation on each side linked to the

dislocation on the other side, a point of view that will become clearer when we turn to studies of patriarchy.

The problem may be approached in simple terms. If the men who venture into 'women's terrain' become 'derived subjects', including research that takes a women's viewpoint in order to interpret them, the men that stay in the traditional male terrain are 'power subjects'. They have a 'firstness' attached to their masculinity. In the early days of men's consciousness groups, the matter of *self-oppression* was central in this context, and I think it has a much wider significance than is currently recognised. It does not only concern the denial that goes into becoming a boy early in childhood, according to much feminist psychodynamic theory, even if that is part of it.

Have men, or the *reality* of men lives, ever been a 'solution' in patriarchal society? Or is there instead a major, hidden *problem* here? Today, men easily become problems for example in the media when they question their role, or try to take over domestic responsibilities. Men are not 'problems' when they behave in the traditional way, with their masculinity simply taken for granted – for example in the every day TV entertainment of men killing other men. Yet are they *real*? I believe that there is a taken-for-granted *sacrifice* on the male side in our culture, and that things become 'problematical' when this granted order of affairs is challenged, even simply by making masculinity into an explicit issue. In brief terms, men can be power subjects or derived subjects – but not themselves, to the extent that the latter seems vague and unknown.

## Conclusion

I have discussed the importance of studies of men in an equal status perspective and some of the new patterns that are uncovered by such studies. What emerges is a wide, new research area where things are still mostly unknown. It is an area of major importance both for gender equality and other social issues, and for gaining a better knowledge of men's problems and attempted solutions. Two studies have been discussed, showing the diverging tendencies among men in a 'width' perspective as well as some issues that appear in a 'depth' approach.

Pro-feminist masculinities studies combine power and gender perspectives or attempt such a combination, and have created a new and better focus for research in this internationally emerging field. At the same time, this paradigm has easily leads to a conflation of gender and power, and I have addressed some problems in this regard. Although men's actual discrimination, dominance and oppressive behaviour vis-à-vis women are all related to their forms of masculinity, the main empirical pattern shows that non-egalitarian or patriarchal traits run through various forms of masculinity. This is related to a deeper level theoretical problem with these approaches, namely the *projection* of patriarchal traits on men's gender, a variant of the present gender fixation (cf. chapter 8). A masculinities hierarchy differs from a patriarchal society, and when this difference is not recognised, the analysis leads astray. A main conclusion, therefore, concerns the need to contextualise masculinities analysis in terms of patriarchal society, and to explore differences as well as connections between the two.

I have discussed the hierarchical masculinities paradigm as an example of a research tradition starting from a 'derived subject' position, using a women's view for understanding men, in a framework where the man should 'help out' in those areas that women find important – also in terms of research. As a consequence, pro-feminist studies of men have mainly followed the women's studies path towards understanding patriarchy, looking at patriarchy through the 'key hole' of gender. Yet this is a strange situation when we recognise that men are in fact often on the inside of patriarchal power relations, and that these relations exist outside as well as within a gender framework. It is connected to an inability to come to terms with men's reality and a 'dislocation of the subject' which is probably no less important among men than among women. In order to uncover this reality, research must focus on the 'firstness' and 'social volume' that hide it, including men's self-oppression or loss of inner empathy. Men's sacrifice and the sacrifice of men – including men's health problems and the fact that men (in Norway) on the average die seven years before women – are important topics here. Examining patriarchal power and the relations hidden by this power are connected.<sup>16</sup>

I end this chapter on a positive note, since I believe that many developments in the studies of men field, as well as the associated equal status policy developments are both important and promising. If men's studies start out as a 'derived subject', like the pro-egalitarian man in the household, practices tend to change things. The focus on men's relationship to other men in masculinities theories and elsewhere is one example of a fruitful departure from a second-hand 'equivalent position epistemology' – one which does not lead back to the outworn neutralist 'relative position epistemology' (cf. chapter 4). There are some key issues or 'reflexes' in this area that have to be *unlearned* if we are to create conditions for *learning*.

As I write this, today's paper tells me that a new survey has found that three quarters of Norwegian men support a proposal that raising women's wage levels should be given main emphasis in the next tariff (wage) negotiations.<sup>17</sup> I find it significant that this demand has almost as much support from men as from women, since everyone knows that such a priority means that other issues (including those raised by male-dominated unions) will not be addressed. Male role and gender equal status opinion work and discussions have evidently had an impact.

This includes the parental leave reform created on the basis on The Male Role Committee's proposal. Only two years after its implementation, more than 60 percent of young fathers are using the home period created by the reform. Recently, a well-known Norwegian journalist, Andreas Hompland, wrote the following about the reform:<sup>18</sup>

"[This is a] smart new reform: the care leave period has been extended, but the mother cannot take all of the [new] leave weeks; four of them are not given unless the father takes them. (...) Such combinations of departmental stick, moral whip and economic carrot has shown themselves to be immeasurably much more efficient than all kinds of attitude campaigns."

Hompland tried it himself. "What did I learn? (...) I learned some new things about myself, my own borders and my patience, both positive and negative. But it was quite demanding also. To take care of, and have sole responsibility for a small baby is



something else than helping the mother (..) It is a work of another kind, which demands one's surrender. It follows another rationality and cannot be delimited."

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<sup>1</sup> Jonasdóttir's (1994:64) critique of Heidi Hartmann's analysis illustrates a general tendency: "It is unclear whom Hartmann identifies as the main opposing parties in the patriarchal system: is it men and women (which she has repeatedly written); is it primarily men, in alliance with and against other men (which is what her summarised definition [of patriarchy] states); is it men *and women* of higher status who wield power over women *and men* of lower status (which she also states)?" Hartmann is one of the few who have attempted an in-depth identification of patriarchal structures (cf. chap. 10), and if *she* is confused, the situation elsewhere is even more chaotic. I think this situation is symptomatic. It is not just an avoidance of male power and/or patriarchy that is involved here. There is also a broader, more subtle tendency that patriarchy and/or men should be *invoked* but not really studied. This is another aspect of the 'avoidance matter'.

<sup>2</sup> As far as I know, the Norwegian study (along with a smaller Swedish survey some years earlier, cf. Jalmert, L 1984) remains unique as a national-level representative survey of men and masculinity issues.

<sup>3</sup> I was contacted by the Committee for designing and supervising the project. The survey interviews were made by a Norwegian opinion institute. The sample included 622 men. 188 variables (including recoded items and indexes) were used.

<sup>4</sup> *The suitability of multivariate analysis of this kind of material – more or less 'artificially' constructed ordinal variables, much internal co-variation, and similar – remains a topic of dispute. The analysis was done mainly through factor and chained factor techniques, with the main results checked by regression and other methods. Since factor analysis remains a somewhat artistic method, I concentrated on the more robust results. The analysis was also hampered by the relatively low quality ('white noise' variation) of the interviews, carried out by interviewers that seems not to have received sufficient guidance. For example, we were aware that some answers were 'honoured' and that the interviewer should emphasise distance (what men really thought, as opposed to what they were supposed to think), and similar issues, yet this requires interviewer training. In general, gender-related interviews have a Brechtian element: in order to capture the social drama, they must go behind the stereotypes.*

<sup>5</sup> Since socialisation experience influence partner selection, a weighing of these factors was not really meaningful on the basis of the study design. There may be an interaction effect here, as indicated by qualitative studies: men from pro-egalitarian homes tend to select more egalitarian-minded women, who in turn have a major influence on the men's attitudes.

<sup>6</sup> As we have seen in a number of cases, survey methods are seldom discussed when the results confirm conventional wisdom, yet when they do not, they may suddenly become so problematical that next to nothing can be said. In this case, a great issue was made out of the fact that some, though not all, of the dependent variables in the study were attitude items; what we did know, however, and what has been confirmed later studies, is that qualitative methods tend to confirm the main picture given by quantitative studies based on such items. Tendencies towards 'correct' answers, to present a 'family facade', to present one's own home contributions as larger than they are, and similar, are to some extent known and mapped, and may be at least roughly corrected for.

<sup>7</sup> Discussed in Holter 1989:41-5,287, based on studies by Hofstede 1980, Williams & Best 1982 and others.

<sup>8</sup> A second goal was a closer look on the problem group, especially men who had been involved in violence against women. The study sample consisted of 23 men and 5 women (partners or wives of the men), since we wanted to bring out the contrasts between the men's portraits and those of the women close to them. Most of the men were in the pro-egalitarian category discussed earlier, usually fathers of

small children, living in or near Oslo (and, in some cases, Bergen). In retrospective, it has become clear that the study suffered from some limitations; I believe we should have included some of the parents of the men also, as a 'generational corrective'. Also, working class men were underrepresented, and the second objective of the study, relating to men's violence, was only partially met, primarily because we got our hands full with the first one. On the other hand, the standard of the interviews was quite high, thanks to a team work effort that involved psychologist Petter Ingebrigtsen, sociology student Helene Aarseth, and myself. The men were interviewed two or more times over a couple of hours, usually in their homes, with emphasis on free association and a slightly 'therapeutic' angle. The study is discussed in Holter & Aarseth 1993.

<sup>9</sup> A fairly large and unrecognised part of work life consists of grandparents' and primarily grandmothers' time used for taking care of their sons' or daughters' children, as has been emphasised in Norway by Gunhild Hagestad especially (Hagestad, G 1988).

<sup>10</sup> The 'laziness' we found was of two different types, one resembling the ordinary version, and a more subtle pattern where a man's statement 'well, I am a bit lazy you know' was also a way of avoiding conflict. In these cases (which are those referred to by Aarseth's fourth type), the woman was very much present as overseer of the home including the man's personal schedule.

<sup>11</sup> In social forms terms, transfers require some immediate re-creative or institutionally regenerative activity, connected to the transference field (cf. chapter 7).

<sup>12</sup> Among our sources were the psychologists Per Isdal, Per Nørbech and others at the *Alternatives To Violence* centre in Oslo, who helped us get in contact with some of the men interviewed in the project.

<sup>13</sup> This paradigm was theoretically formulated especially by Carigan, Connell & Lee 1985; later by Connell, R 1995. It is now applied by many researchers in the field; a major recent contribution is Kimmel, M 1996.

<sup>14</sup> For example, the four case studies in Bob Connell's recent book on masculinities (1995) certainly show that the concept can be used fruitfully, yet once more we are halfway to 'life style' and 'ideology', and the link to equality *practice* is not clear. – Another disturbing fact in this context the often-reported finding among those working with men who use violence against women, who at least on traditional psychological tests often score 'feminine' rather than 'masculine'. We found traits in this direction also among the violent subsample of men in the life pattern study.

<sup>15</sup> The fact that oppression of women can be found across masculinities may still be explained as a consequence of the dynamics of the masculinities hierarchy as a whole, through dominance mechanisms. Yet this does not immediately help identify why some men oppress women, others less so, etc.

<sup>16</sup> Already in 1975, Martin Meissner argued that for understanding sexual inequality, research must focus on "the hierarchical organisations", "the dominant form of control of resources, activities, and interpersonal relations. The sources of sexual inequality must be examined at the organisational level, where men organise the work, define functions, and distribute time", creating inequality by "imposing monopolisation of activities lacking specific definition and a generalised personal service function" on women. Yet such studies remain exceptions to the rule.

<sup>17</sup> Most employees in Norway are union members, and the unions and employers negotiate wage and other matters once a year. Arbeiderbladet 19th. of February; survey conducted by Opinion a/s on behalf of A-pressen.

<sup>18</sup> *Dagbladet* 6th. of Jan. 1996:3

# Chapter 7 Social forms analysis

## Introduction

This chapter outlines the social forms analysis framework that has been implicated in the preceding chapters, starting from its less complex categories and moving towards the more complex ones. I discuss problems of contextual sensitivity in sociology, feminist and other critiques of 'abstract categorisation', and how an analytical framework can be minimalist in this respect while emphasising qualitative difference and change.

Three main conceptual levels are distinguished in the analysis. The first consists of activities and transfers existing in three elemental forms – sharing, giving and exchanging. Instead of a technical view of transfers, I emphasise their importance for social identity, introducing 'transference field' as a sociological category in this context.

At the second level I outline the notion of main reciprocity relationships like social class and gender. The main reciprocity relations connect different transfers and activity forms and constitute a main part of their context. Institutionalisation is main process on this level, which in this sense is also a specifically 'sociological' level. Questions of power, dominance and authority are discussed in this context.

Finally, I move to the third social form level, discussing the differences between a social form and the more conventional notion of a mode of production. A social form is an organised cluster of main reciprocity relationships which is common to various more concrete social formations. I discuss hierarchical and other relations between coexisting forms elements, and how a form can be seen as a pattern of 'meta-institutionalisation'. Thereby, the present chapter prepares the ground for subsequent discussion of the gender system as a main reciprocity relationship.

## Background

The preceding chapters have shown the importance of commodity analysis for understanding gender. However, its limits have also emerged. As a 'familiarisation process', gender leads through reciprocity patterns that differ from commodity relations. These patterns must be understood on their own and seen in combination. Also, commodity analysis of a particular 'transactional order' like the gender market differs from gender, capital and patriarchy analyses concerning society as a whole.

These are main points of the framework to be presented. The framework was developed partly on the basis of interdisciplinary contemporary studies like the ones discussed in earlier chapters, and partly in historical research on gender and patriarchy. My goal was a framework that as far as possible was sensitive towards change and variation, with the least amount of 'distortion' of difference through modern categorisation. The result is neither a new paradigm nor a form of grand theory, but a way of reorienting existing paradigms. The kernel of the framework is limited, even simplistic: three main 'horizontal' forms of interaction, three main

'vertical' levels of analysis. It is the radical epistemology and the methods for orienting the 'observer system' within this kernel that gives it an edge.

Although the framework can be applied also in other contexts, it was created through struggling with the supposed facts about gender and patriarchy. If I had been satisfied with existing research approaches I could have stayed with them. Yet my studies brought me to the following conclusions:

- (1) Most of the supposed knowledge in this area is constructed around, or at least deeply influenced by, the modern view of gender and patriarchy.
- (2) The epistemological situation resembles pre-heliocentric astronomy: gender and patriarchy categories are constructed as if the world at large revolved around our own local position in it.
- (3) The equivalent and relative views of gender (cf. chapter 4) are components of this wider 'gender fixation'.
- (4) A main reason why gender phenomena are realigned in this way is the in-depth link between social identity and gender in our local setting. Tendentially, any attempt to move out of the gender fixation is perceived as a threat to identity.

Much evidence on these four accounts is discussed in subsequent chapters in this text. The present discussion moves some steps away from gender, asking why it is that social categories in general become 'abstractist' and closed to variation and change. For example, instead of discussing gifts in a gender setting, I discuss modern ideas of gifts in more general terms, focusing on how commodity-related assumptions are smuggled into gift analyses. Before turning to gender as a form of meta-institutionalisation, I outline some general traits of the latter category. All this does not imply that the social forms framework is only incidentally or externally related to a critique of gender and patriarchy. Instead, the present attempt can itself be interpreted in a social forms view, as a kind of framework that can be outlined somewhat further than before, due to present-day feminist and equal status developments. What follows, therefore, is not 'finished' in any sense, but an approximation, or a workable blueprint for further analysis.

## Activities and transfers

Social forms analysis starts from an idea of activities that may exist in very different frameworks, and activity results that may be transferred in quite dissimilar ways.

Starting from transfers and activities is an approach that differs from one where communication or power is the point of departure. One may argue that such a starting point already has a certain modernist presumption built in – 'activity' easily means focusing on 'work', and perhaps forgetting other aspects of people's lives. Further, modern society may be fairly unique in its emphasis on activities or in its abstract attitude towards them.

This type of objection is important, and it may be answered on two levels. Possibly a notion of activity can be rescued from modernist presumptions. On another level it may not matter much whether we start with activity, communication or some other similar category. These are all 'nouns', while the point of the analysis is the 'verbs' – exchanging, giving and sharing. The verbs may be applied to different nouns, while the analytical framework remains the same. Yet verbs without nouns become empty and static, and in this context, I believe activity is in fact the most fruitful starting point. It retains a material connection, while not depending on a narrow materialist definition. It is more closely linked to transfer and social identity than power or communication. One may argue that the kernel of society consists of the interconnections of activities. This is what makes each of us unique – and social. Society in this interpretation is basically 'interactivity', while the interconnections of power or communication are secondary and less advanced or manifold by comparison.

This type of argument also illustrates the danger of abstractism: we run the risk of projecting the modern emphasis on activity to the world at large. It does not really help that using 'power' or 'communication' as points of departure entails similar problems. All these concepts have to be changed or translated in some way in order to make sense in many contexts. Like the notion of activity, they are bound up with modern circumstances.

Some objections are more easily answered. Although one may overlook relations within a sphere of 'passivity', which is always presupposed when a concept of activity is used, activity analysis does not necessarily entail a narrowing into traditional work analysis. It can be defined more broadly in the context of contemporary society, involving domestic and non-wage activities as well as wage work, extending into a general notion of actions creating results. Communication may thereby be seen as a form of activity, and we may also argue that all activities have some communicational aspect, departing from an idea of activity *per se* as alienated, non-communicative labour.<sup>1</sup>

At first sight, such a broadening of the activity category may seem strange as a point of departure for gender analysis. A main link of modern patriarchal ideology has been the connection of activity and masculinity on the one hand, passivity and femininity on the other. Are not women thereby drawn into a 'masculinistic terrain' from the very beginning? For this reason, some feminists have warned against activity-based analyses. For example, Karin Widerberg (1987:56 my trans.) has argued that one main reason why Marxist theories have not succeeded in explaining oppression of women has been their one-sided focus on work. "The individual as a gendered being is not a topic of interest, only what she does, her activity. (..) In the materialist view there is an implicit assumption that the genders, apart from the obvious biological difference, are 'really' identical." Marxist feminists, Widerberg argues, have been afraid of taking biology seriously.

I do not think these are necessary consequences of a focus on activity. Also, this choice must be evaluated in view of the alternatives, like sexuality, a concept which scarcely is less linked to modern patriarchy. As Widerberg says (op.cit.58), sexuality-based feminist approaches easily bring a set of assumptions about the normalcy of heterosexuality along. Even more important, in my view, is the wider background

assumption that intimacy must centre on sex, on way or the other. If it is about bodies, it 'has' to be about sex (cf. chapter 8).

When we evaluate the actual, contemporary meaning of categories like sexuality and activity, what appears is clearly a *connection* between them. The tendency to make everyone into workers on the first account corresponds to everyone becoming sexual beings on the second, reflecting different sides of the same modern arrangement. Concepts like communication, power, activity and sexuality are all parts of this arrangement, and even if they create different angles or lines of approach, they also suffer from similar general problems. Thereby the matter of verbs reappears, the way such notions are used and developed.

Activity undergoes a 'tripartite' treatment in the present framework. Firstly, the whole 'sex objectification' and 'desire' end of activity, sexuality, care, domestic 'being', etc. – i.e. the *specific* senses in which women have been classified as passive in modern patriarchy – are identified and treated *as* activities. These sphere of reproduction activities are credited with no more, no less importance than those of the sphere of production. Their relative importance at any given point is a broadly empirical question, within a limit of possible conflict between the two spheres.<sup>2</sup> No assumption is made that reproduction activities are secondary or derived forms compared to the traditional wage work definition.

Secondly, the reasons *why* women's activity often appears as passivity are sought identified. This has been done in earlier chapters through critical analysis of gender commodity aspects. I also introduced the notion of gender as a means of counterpositioning vis-à-vis the economy at large.

Thirdly, this perspective does not imply that activity is widened into meaninglessness. In the modern context, a debate about activity usually has an economic core: 'who is active' is a wider version of 'who creates value'.

If we have identified the *specific* silence of the 'activity language' in the case of gender, or have approached it in reasonably precise terms, we do not have to construe all and any silence into parts of its grammar. We may still argue that some women (or men) are more active than others in an economic perspective. The definition of economic activity is no longer slanted in favour of wage labour. This is important for leaving the framework open and for making it possible to connect gender issues to questions of social class.

Activities are associated with transfer forms, and are usually regulated by these, while in turn influencing and changing them. The results of activities can be transferred either (a) as part of the activity itself, or (b) subsequently in a separated form of interaction.

At the outset it should be noted that activities oriented towards other people, or 'inner-objectivating' activities, usually belong to category (a) rather than (b), as long as we see them as concrete, particular types of action. This is obviously of importance for understanding, for example, why care so often becomes 'invisible' in our society. The result is only sensuously present as part of another person; it is not handed over in a separate act.

Yet this concrete activity angle is also easily misleading. Activities associated with power are also often invisible in the concrete sense, yet *here* no one doubts their existence. It is the wider social character of care activity rather than its concrete character that gives it a low status in our society.

As soon as we introduce the concept of transfer, we move away from a purely concrete view. Now questions of rights to the activity's results appear. At that level, human resource-oriented activity does not differ from other activity; it has the same general aspect and is not 'purely' concrete. The most particularistic care and personal service may subsequently be the object of the most universalistic interaction, as is the case when care contributes to labour power sold in the labour market. However, even if it is logically possible and in many contexts also practically feasible to treat human beings as 'resources' or transfer items like things, the social form may make it unrealistic or impossible, as is discussed later.

Two assumptions are involved in this approach to transfers and activities. Firstly, human beings are indeed the result of activities, not only their own 'regenerative' action, but also the work of other people. Surely human beings are *more* than 'work products', yet they are not simply made from the Idea, like Athena from the head of Zeus. Their self-activity exists in combination with other people's activities, a work that is still predominantly *women's* work in our society. This view differs from many variants of a socialisation perspective. Socialisation, learning and other forms of self-directed activity must be understood as part of a wider activity organisation, and especially in view of the gender-related patterns that regulate this area. – Secondly, activities are communicational, expressive, and a view of communication as part of activity is preferred to a view that puts communications first, activities second.

Transfers are also often power arrangements, with disciplinary measures that appear in various forms both in the transfer itself and in the activities it regulates. According to some critical views, activity or work *by itself* exist in an inner relationship to power, since power, in simple terms, created work in the first place, as distinct from earlier ways of living and securing livelihood. With class society, the basis for a category of 'labour' emerged, as alienated activity.

This brings us to the wider category problems mentioned above: how to avoid a projective use of categories; how to delimit the analytical framework. The notion of activity may serve to illustrate some of these problems. It is clear that concrete terms for activities exist also outside of a social class or power context, and we may also find general activity concepts. The fact that activity usually is less *abstract* for example in early historical societies with little class division does not imply that no *general* notion exists.<sup>3</sup>

We are faced, here as elsewhere, with a 'translation' problem that unavoidably means understanding other contexts in our own way, yet one in which the local (modern society) distortion can be reduced as far as possible. A critical inquiry into the 'social anatomy' of our own notion of activity is one step. Another is the recognition that other concepts of activity may not only be concretely different, but also representative of a different kind of generalisation. Activities may not be abstracted in the modern sense. A third step concerns the identification of this other form of generalisation and the kinds of processes it refers to. Finally, the role of this generalisation in society as a

whole must be examined. It may be a highly generalised concept and yet be peripheral in terms of the core elements of a given society, or quite concrete and specific, yet also very central.

## Analysis traits

All these steps are discussed in the following sections, as a methodology of approximation. Some of this resembles the earlier discussion of gender as code, on a more general level. Categories like 'activity' and 'power' are points of departure, and not fixed or static categories. An element of critique is necessary for being able to nuance or change them, or leave them behind, in order to discover something other, something different. What we have in the case of activity, communication, sexuality, power and much else is a modern society epistemological and ontological starting point, and social forms analysis suggests ways of 'de-objectifying' this knowledge.

Some main traits are outlined here.

*The development of participative, 'non-positivist', process-oriented approaches.* Social forms analysis is non-positivist in the sense of rejecting the universalism of positivism, not in the sense of rejecting empirical evidence, including quantitative material. By universalism I mean the tendency to overlook social and historical qualitative difference and change, and instead insert modern notions as eternally valid. Universalism and essentialism are interpreted as related tendencies or sides to the coin, with materialism and idealism as more specific variants.

The term used for this broader sociological tendency is *abstractism*. Abstractist concepts are 'mental coinage', categories that resemble money in their universalist claims and their exchangeability into anything, their attempt to absorb all and any concreteness into themselves.

Abstractist concepts may be more or less 'embodied', since notions of the body may function in this manner as much as notions of the mind. What they have in common is that they hide their own roots, their own factual present-day engagement, behind a veil of eternal validity. They appear 'as such'. We cannot escape abstractism in a modern context, but we can reduce its spell, and this is a main task of the analysis.

Debates connected to this issue have in fact been central in many research contexts; indeed, most debates have links to it. Basic questions of the 'observer system' position in the 'observed system' appear. Many kinds of antidotes exist to abstractism – historical, practice-oriented, constructionist and institutional approaches – all with a main relativistic message: the observer is in fact located, what was conceived as a universal truth turns out to be valid only in one social setting. As an example, social anthropologists in the 1970s and later discussed the 'formalist' approach to economic categories, which was also an abstractist approach, versus a 'substantivist' or institutional approach, which is closer to the social forms view. A critique of abstractism does not mean a collapse into relativism or the 'all is narrative' standpoint, as shall be shown.



Social forms analysis can therefore be seen as one of many approaches within a broad, interdisciplinary tendency towards *contextuality*. However it also resurrects the marginalised critique of economy tradition that emphasises the qualitative aspects of economic relations including the forms of value. As discussed earlier, this critical tradition is not commonly known among social researchers, or not well enough known to be fruitfully used or applied.

In a wide sense, questions of social form appear as soon as the sociologist is faced with trying to understand 'the other' – or the self. Notions like Ferdinand Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (association) bring out differences between social forms. Much is to be said for an argument that this has been *the* kernel area of sociology, with sociology *as* a science of what distinguishes capitalism or modernity; we may include most postmodernist as well as critical theory here, going back to Weber, Mead, Simmel, Durkheim and Veblen as well as Marx.<sup>4</sup>

What is implied in this wide sense of social form awareness is only an emphasis on contextual difference, including the difference of modern and non-modern society, and a categorical framework that at least grasps some of this difference. Many social researchers share this interest. However, some context-minded researchers have moved further in this direction than others, or they have done so variously during their lifetime. Jean-Paul Sartre is an example: in his late writings, Sartre became much more focused on the *relative* character of much of his former existentialist philosophy. He aimed at a historical-sociological contextualisation of what had formerly been presented in general terms.<sup>5</sup> A parallel case is Erving Goffman, whose late work on 'social framing' is one point of departure in the present gender analysis (Goffman, E 1975; Goffman, E 1977; cf. Belknap & Leonard 1991).

Certain directions in social science, notably the critique of economy traditions associated with Marxism, have been more or less 'programme bound' to think in terms in social form (or, at least, mode of production). Yet the actual sensitivity of the research is not determined by programme alone, and much of this discussion (from the 1970s especially) remains on a level of quoting sociological insights in Marx's texts against the supposedly general frameworks presented by dialectical materialists. Applied research has been missing.

*A multidimensional approach that nevertheless is not fully 'relativistic'.* The idea of social forms analysis is not to substitute one general paradigm for another, at least not in the contemporary sense of paradigm. As an example, consider the paradigm of 'economic man', which usually entails a view that people use cost-effective means of getting what they want, or that economical circumstances are of importance in interaction. The method is not one of replacing this notion with some opposed concept, like the 'idealist' view of interaction, but rather to contextualise it. This means not only to investigate the circumstances in which it is in fact relevant and those where it is not, but also to understand *why* it appears 'decontextualised', as general truth. This 'why' is the central point.

As social science has progressed, more has become known about the tremendous variation of human life. Social relations change, and change has a well-known tendency to go beyond any preconceived conception of the world. The *universe of the social*, which includes what social life can be as well as what it is or has been, is far

wider than our *actual locality* within it, and also much wider than the *probability field* surrounding this actuality. The debate about how thinly these probabilities and possibilities may be stretched and still be part of the social universe is not taken up here; suffice to say that it is practically speaking immense, and that most attempts to frame it into some eternal limit have failed. The recognition of social possibility is itself influenced by the social form and its establishment of a 'main reality', making other form elements 'irreal' or only 'peripherally real'.

This emphasis on width, change and possibility does not conform to the dialectical or Hegelian view (cf. Appendix 2). Sohn-Rethel analysed how the exchange abstraction set the stage for Kant's pure concepts. In my interpretation, Hegel's philosophy (1986, 1991) represents a further step compared to Kant, going into the process behind the exchange, creating a conceptuality of pure valorisation conceived as the self-movement of thought. In the greater *Logic* especially, Hegel departed from the *stasis* of reification in its market stage in favour of a dynamic conceptuality. His categories resemble mental factories – always producing, transcending, creating mental surplus.

I maintain that Hegelianism has a mission when the alternative is a static or positivistic view of society – in other words: quite often. Hegel's writing is often stunning in its relational capabilities, and therefore important also from a feminist point of view. It is not incidental that critical theory regularly has turned to Hegelianism for visions of change and alternatives to the present order.

Precisely for these reasons, however, it is important to recognise its limits and deeper identity.<sup>6</sup> The authoritarian connections of Hegelianism are not incidental. While Hegel dissolved the stasis of Kant, he also created a philosophy which is extremely abstractist in the sense of subsuming all kinds of variation under one category, *Becoming*, a pure surplus-like movement forwards. It is well known that this movement was supposed to be spearheaded by the greatest minds, the world spirit as represented by Europe. Yet the method is the main thing, not whether it is filled with spirit – or matter, as in the case of Marx. Compared to Kant's noun-like concepts, Hegel is to be credited for turning to verbs – yet only to one basic verb, '*more, more*'. It is no coincidence that Marx turns to Hegelianism when describing the most advanced logic of capital. The method created a metaphysics of 'dialectical transcendence' that in fact *differs* from most of the changes brought out by social research. It must be carefully disentangled from the far wider category of *social change*.

The social forms idea of change is different from Hegel's. The 'problem' of change is that it revolts against categories like *Becoming*. There is a conflict, in which one side will have to yield, and since change does not, it is the category that must either be dropped, or stretched into meaninglessness. Change can only be approximated, and this means focusing on the multidimensional character of social processes and the connected, manifold *ways* in which social relations are transformed.

It is fairly well known that gift-oriented societies do not *develop* in the same sense as commodity-oriented societies. The sense of time and history is different. This fact has a larger relevance. 'Gift change' is different from 'commodity change'. On the power dimension, changes 'from above' are unlike those 'from below'. On the activities dimension, externally oriented activities effectuate different kinds of changes from

internally oriented ones. In general, then, categories of change are themselves 'changing'; like notions of time, development, etc. they vary with the context. What we want to avoid here and elsewhere is concepts that force the analysis into a presupposition, by insisting to be taken as valid 'as such'.

*Analysing the extensionality of categories.* The social forms framework is based on a *world epistemology*, introduced earlier, in which the current outlook is seen as one limited view or local sample of the social universe. If we will never know the extent of the latter, since 'knowing' the limits of social possibility requires the death of the knower (or similar paradoxes to the same basic philosophical effect). We may instead more fruitfully focus on the limits of the former, our local position, and ways to overcome some of these limits. This is not achieved by rising above them, or through detachment, but by going into them, understand them from the inside, which includes a minimum of *empathy* with those inside, trying to see the world from *their* place, being in their shoes.

Social forms analysis distinguishes between the social context on the one hand, and the parts of the context that are perceived and worked with on a subjective level on the other hand. The latter is the part of the context that has become topical or *thematic* (Holter & Aarseth 1993). Why do we create themes from contexts in the way we do, filtering our experiences, motivating some forms of action and constraining others? Why are some forms of thematic treatment given priority over others?

At this point, it is useful to distinguish between the *intensional* and *extensional* aspect of social science categories. I use these terms sociologically in two broad senses. The intensional aspect is what a category tries to say, its meaning as intended by its maker or user, while the extensional aspect is what it actually says, in the context of its use. Its extensionality includes how it was evolved, what kind of circumstances shaped it, how and when it is used and for what purposes, and what its use actually effectuates.<sup>7</sup>

Social forms analysis is a way of interpreting concepts according to their extensional meaning, or reorient them in terms of their actual circumstances. Some of this is similar to the postmodern method of deconstruction, yet the method also differs. We ask what kind of implications a concept has, what it would look like if rephrased in terms of its real setting rather than the intensional one.

For example, we may reinterpret the economic man paradigm as a form of thinking that expresses the situation of some men in the development of modern society, a view that has a strong but usually implicit link to certain formations of masculinity. We bring in more of the social context by examining the tradition surrounding this paradigm and the practices in its background. Through a world epistemology, in this case masculinity studies, we may create new knowledge, as far as the extensional hypothesis holds true.<sup>8</sup>

What such a method does, however, is not to *invalidate* the concept, as some have mistakenly believed; it may be filled with all kinds of local circumstances and yet retain some general validity, and the latter remains a question to be determined on its own grounds. By itself *the extension never disproves the intension*. What the contextual interpretation does, instead, is to suggest ways in which it may be more

meaningful to understand the concept and the phenomena associated with it, angles that are often hidden or unrecognised on the intensional level.

Postmodernists might say we look for 'narrative' in what was supposed to be science, yet the idea here is not that the narrative necessarily invalidates the science but rather that it should be taken more fully and openly into account. At this point, epistemological and methodological developments in feminist and gender studies are ahead of those in many other fields of social science, since 'gender' tendentially makes these background considerations relevant.

*Social forms analysis and commodity critique.* Social forms analysis includes a 'reoriented' version of Marx's value forms analysis and commodity critique. A critical outline of the commodity aspect of gender has been introduced in preceding chapters, while the reorientation is further discussed in part two of this text. I shall only clarify a few general points concerning the relation between social forms analysis and commodity critique here.

A first point concerns the fact that an element of critique of the present order is necessary for at all to be able to approach and understand other, non-dominant, latent or hidden social relations. Such an approach requires a willingness to recognise that 'things are not always what they seem'. There usually comes a point where such a view may be perceived as a critique, and where a critique is in fact necessary in order to reach knowledge.

At the same time, much is to be 'unlearned' in traditional critical theory, not least from the point of view of gender and masculinities studies. The multi-dimensionality of social forms analysis differs from the 'One/Other' framework of much critical theory – the duality of the commodity and its alternative, of value and use value, or of capital and worker. The unified notion of the other, as *the* other, usually means it turns all the more easily, into *our* other, i.e. a part of the one from which it supposedly was different. It becomes 'projective' – or 'transferential' in a negative manner, according to the present terminology.

All kinds of thinking of social alternatives probably enhance some forms of wish-fulfilment processes and possibilities for 'idealist' errors. Yet the idea of the one and the other, the dualism of much critical theory, seems singularly fit to enhance such elements. Things at once become more complicated but also more fruitful, when we accept the idea that 'the other' is at best a preliminary step for understanding *others*, i.e. the *variation* that is usually present and as important as the variation within the one.

While commodity analysis starts from exchange and 'other' interaction, usually opposing the abstract character of economic interaction to the concrete character of other interaction, social forms analysis starts from *several forms of transfer that each involves its own forms of generalisation*. This is a second main point. Besides its one-dimensionality, the idea of the cold abstraction of the One *vis-à-vis* the warm concreteness of the Other has enlarged the *projective* element of critique (here, also, with fairly obvious gender overtones). The present approach is different.

I distinguish between *generalisation* as a cross-form and transhistorical process of cognition, and *abstraction* which is used of the specific form of epistemologies associated with the commodity form. 'Abstraction' may of course also be used in the former, general sense (and 'generalisation' in a commodity sense). Yet the suggested usage fits the one in much critical theory, where 'abstraction' has been linked specifically to commodities, capital and modern processes. I go a step further, disentangling the notion of abstraction from that of generalisation as such.

Abstraction (as argued in Appendix 2), involves two forms of generalisation, 'classificatory' and 'relational' commonalty, existing in a specific interrelationship. Although the problems of distinguishing between generalisation and abstraction are not fully solved in the present text, the distinction is certainly clear enough to be fruitful for further analyses. It avoids a conceptual muddle and serves to clarify the fact that different social forms do indeed involve different forms of generalisation, while also bringing out some of the specificity of commodity form abstraction.<sup>9</sup>

It is true that an idea that cognitions and epistemologies 'express' or 'are influenced by' social forms may become just a new and somewhat more complex version of mechanistic reflection-theory materialism. Instead of minds reflecting matter, we now have cognitions influenced by social forms. More is said of this philosophical minefield later. Disregarding the philosophical debate, there are common-sense reasons for the present view. We have all experienced a *tendency* towards appreciating the world and our own place in it *differently* according to whether we give, share or exchange. Further, this is supported by the existence of broad historical and sociological links between different reciprocity contexts and different world views. Understanding these links remains a main challenge for social science.

The connection of reciprocity and epistemology is also a main theme right in the middle of the gender debate. Women and men are not only engaged on the same ground, seeing two sides to the same issue, but also on quite different grounds, or in different reciprocity contexts, creating different epistemological frameworks and ideas about what exactly this 'issue' of gender and equality consists of in the first place. In women's studies, understanding of how women structure their experiences has also meant an inquiry into the unique reciprocity relations clustered around the positions of women.

*Activity and power.* In the present framework the emphasis is on the *form* of activity, often expressed in the transfer of activity results, and on the form of power, more than on activity or power as such, or on these two as alternative points of departure. One may argue that power is implicated in the term activity itself, as mentioned above, or again that activities are useful categories also when most kinds of power, or at least what Alvin Toffler (1990) calls 'surplus power', is absent. The latter is the view taken here; activities do not necessarily imply social asymmetry, control, or (surplus) power; rather, different activity contexts may include different forms and degrees of power.

Power is often connected to exploitation, yet we should avoid the 'economistic' idea that exploitation is always the kernel of power. The 'politicistic' idea is more common in critical sociology today: power becomes an all-embracing and self-sufficient category with no material basis. Social forms analysis reintroduces the question of 'the

form of wealth' and the economic and other reciprocity context of power, without claiming economic predeterminancy in all kinds of power. The social forms framework keeps to the 'minimalist' proposition that transfers often involve an element of power, which is often connected to exploitation. The interconnections among these three may be of main importance, but also indirect, two-way, and complex, with power, activity or exploitation regimes developing their own internal dynamics.

## Transference and identity

Transfers may also be seen in a psychodynamic view. Transfers are attempts to make some order in the chaos of activity, to create some accountability, and impose a layer of control in a very basic sense. This is at least a relevant interpretation of the concern with transfers in much economic theory. A distributive scheme – as in Marx: '1 coat = x yards of linen' – functions as a *regulatory instance* in the theory. The dream of the theorist, then, becomes one of creating the perfect scheme, fully regulatory of all activity.

A transfer is surrounded by a larger cultural, social and psychological field. I shall refer to these fields as *transference fields*, taking the psychodynamic concept into a more sociological context. The transference field consists of the communication and activity that surrounds the transfer itself, including unconscious communication and transference in the Freudian meaning of the word. The wider notion of transference is useful for highlighting the *social* and psychological aspects that tend to be forgotten as soon as we turn to transfers, distribution, and economic theory, even in its 'alternative' forms, like the economy of gift giving. Much current gender politics is operative mainly in the transference field.

Transfers usually involve social tension; conflicts related to acceptance, asymmetry, power, and exploitation. Transference fields usually contain *reworkings* of the transfer, or include such reworkings at least on a symbolic level. A main element of the transference field is therefore often an *attempted solution* to the tensions and dilemmas present in the transfer order. Non-dominant transfer form elements like gift elements in commodity exchange are often shifted towards the transference field, while becoming 'non-issues' on the transfer agenda itself. In a manner of speaking they take back, in symbolical reality, what they lost economically. Transference misplaces in order to replace.

The transference field and the attempts to make sense of conflicts and move out of dilemmas bring individual actor-focused theory into view, as against structural or regulatory theory. It is tempting to conceptualise the transfer in structural terms, the transference in individual terms, yet this is misleading. This duality runs through transfers themselves as well as transference fields. An actor focus does not necessarily mean a transference focus. The case of 'the individual' vis-à-vis 'society' rests with economy and materiality as much as with symbolic reality or 'ideality'. This is important since contemporary commodity transfer and transference create 'spontaneous' materialism in the first area, idealism in the second. – Further, if the transference field exists in some contradistinction to the transfer, it should also be noted that much interaction does not correspond to that division in the first place, and is therefore better served by other frameworks than the one presented here. Precisely

due to the emphasis on 'radical otherness' in the analytical framework, we should avoid putting all and any otherness into it, in this case into the transference field. This is related to the next subject.

*Avoiding 'transfer fetishism'.* According to J. Parry and M. Bloch (1991:1,3), anthropologists as well as sociologists and historians have often "fallen into the trap of attributing to money in general what is in fact a specific set of meanings which derive from our own culture", like crediting money "with an *intrinsic* power to revolutionise [traditional] society and culture". The same tendency is present in portrayals of gift exchange; "*our* ideology of the gift has been constructed as antithesis to market exchange", not least in Marxist writings, where "the exchange of gifts" has been a symbol of societal "innocence" (op.cit.9). Further, Parry and Bloch disagree with views where transfers by themselves engender social change, or become a basis of everything else.

These are relevant warnings, and like Parry and Bloch I believe it is important to avoid 'transfer fetishism' in an approach to economic transactions. I also find their concept of *transactional orders* useful. A transactional order is defined as transfers in wider societal contexts, each with its own 'value class' (op.cit. 23,15). In the present terms, a transactional order includes activities, transfers and transference fields.

I am more hesitant towards Parry and Bloch's idea of putting main emphasis on the moral element of the transactional order. Their portrayal of moral elements often comes close to the transference concept used here. It is true that exchange and other transfer patterns are embedded in moral systems, or what they call 'the morality of exchange'. Yet if we regard these moral systems as the *basis* of transfers, we are rescued from transfer fetishism only at the cost of idealist essentialism. Instead I think we should keep to the notion of deep and wide *associations* between transfers on the one hand, and moral elements and transference fields on the other. The idea of *causation*, with the moral system as cause, the transfer as effect, is often empirically misleading, and in general too narrow as an approach to this complex unity.

Marx's writings are important for investigating transfer fetishism – both in negative and positive respects. First, it is clear that Marx's kernel theory differs from the *labour fetishism* of much materialism. In the present case, our starting point was not 'activity as such', but activity as *formed* in association with *gender*, following Marx's method at this point. "In order to develop the concept of capital, it is necessary to start not from labour, but from value, the exchange value which is already developed in the circulation." (Marx 1974:170).<sup>10</sup> – It cannot be doubted that Marx, even when describing the close connections between transfers like modern commodity exchange and the character of capitalism, also consciously tried to disentangle the transfer level as such from the social character of the economic regime behind it. Yet such a method made for more complex theory, one in which 'capitalism' could no longer directly be identified by certain transfers, like those of the market, and in the interpretations of Marx' work that prevailed among later Marxists, the link between transfer and society once more became fairly direct and simple: if one did away with the transfers of capitalism, one would do away with capitalism itself.

Transfers, then, do not directly 'regulate' activities; they do so as surrounded by, and in a complex interplay with, wider transference fields, where the latter often represent



attempts to make up for the faults of the former. For example, anonymity and indifference in the transactional order may be counteracted by more personal and gift-like presentations of self (like the techniques described by Erwin Goffman), while the possibility of psychic invasion in more personal reciprocity may be counteracted by various forms of distancing.<sup>11</sup>

*Creating identity.* Together, activities, transfers and transferences contribute to the creation of *social identity*. A broad notion of identity is involved here. It consists of a groundwork for ideas of the world and one's part in it, a relatively permanent meaning framework for action and an 'institutionalisation of the self'. There is a differentiation between the individual and the world at large. However, the social self which is created may emphasise the group more than the individual. Social identities exist in many variants, and the common element emphasised here is their connection to the transactional order. As individuals transact, they also reestablish social identity.

At this point, a materialistic notion of life dependency and livelihood in terms of activities and transfers remains relevant. The transfer connects individuals' acts and validates them as social activities, relevant for society or 'useful' in a broad sense. The transactional order as a whole involves life chances and material needs, and it is therefore often crucial and formative for social identity. Still, the 'technisist' notion of transfers must be avoided, for questions of *social recognition* including empathy and transference are important also on the material level. The transactional order is psychological as much as material: 'feeding the person' is part of 'recognising the person'. Transfers should not be conceived in modern market fashion as anonymous meeting places of fragmented needs, since not only the transfer but also the need varies with the context.

*Power and authority.* As stated, the transference often contains attempted solutions to the power-related problems of the transfer. 'Power' can often be connected to the transfer, 'authority' to transference. Authority includes a working through of power, a legitimation and accommodation. However, the meaning of these terms also shifts with the reciprocity context. In some circumstances, power may take 'refuge' from the transfer itself and insert itself all the more forcefully *as* self-control or inner authority. In critical theory this is often seen as a result of the transfer or the specifically *economic* area having become fairly detached or 'sublimated' from power relations in the first place.

The regulatory role of the transfer is usually connected to its legitimacy role. In a context of large power differences and advanced stratification, the pressure towards transference becomes larger. Further, this process becomes more important in the modern economic setting where power appears lodged in the sensuous presence of commodities, beyond the control of individuals, resembling natural phenomena. The more equalised the transfer, on the surface, the greater the load on the transference field.<sup>12</sup> When power relations that in fact are there, are not openly addressed, they are worked on in backstage areas instead.

Studying power separated from activity is usually misleading, and power isolated from reciprocity even more so. The reciprocity dimension (and, often, the activity dimension) cuts across the power dimension, *forcing* power to take refuge at different 'standpoints'. This is important for relativising power in a given social formation like



the modern one, and for reintroducing a sense of *force* going beyond that of power. Power is not simply something that changes form, while keeping the same content. Power in the modern context often means power between people derived from their economic positions. These positions, in turn, contain another and deeper-level power of commodities over people. Power in non-modern contexts differs from both of these.<sup>13</sup> This kind of basis-difference is discussed later in terms of meta-institutionalisation.

Earlier, the concept of transactional order was used of the transfer and related activities as a whole. It can also be used specifically of the ground rules of the transfer, its power aspect, i.e. the more or less distinct political field associated with the transfer.

## Genders and selves as products of transactional orders

"I believe gender is in part created in the traffic between 'dirt' and 'poison' on the one hand and 'beauty' and 'health' on the other. The two genders operate accordingly in two complementary positions. Men are receivers of these dangers and blessings; women are givers." (Borchgrevink, T 1987:141, my trans.).

As we venture further into the terrain of various kinds of 'traffics' and transactional orders, we also increasingly face an epistemological and conceptual problem: categories that supposedly designate transfers in the plural, or common elements within them, turn out primarily to be meaningful of one of them, and distortive when used towards the others. This is further elaborated below in the case of European conceptions of gift societies. Transactional orders and transfers have a radical edge in terms of difference; they are usually more different than our concepts allow for.

Investigating such difficulties is a main point of the analysis. We may recognise some typical solutions to the radical difference problem. In one of these, the difference is still mainly unrecognised. In another, it is 'defensively' recognised. It is not understood in its own terms, but in terms imported from other areas. In a third solution, it takes the 'offensive' and becomes a more general part of the paradigm itself. There is an attempt to reorganise the epistemology and conceptual framework accordingly, creating a more relativistic approach.

On the whole, the second and third approach have been better recognised in social anthropology than in sociology. The anthropological view of modern gender formulated by Tordis Borchgrevink in the tradition of Gayle Rubin (1975) does not only concern the fact that masculinity and femininity are influenced by changing circumstances. It goes further; the 'noun' is in part *created* by the 'verb', implying that different verbs would give very different results. An epistemological reorganisation is involved here.

This line of thought is still quite unusual in sociology. There, instead, the notion of the self, the person or the subject has often remained static, whatever the transfer context. The nouns are supposed to exist independently of the verbs. Even in Alvin Gouldner's deservedly well-known discussion of reciprocity (see Appendix 3), we basically remain within one conceptuality, one framework of the person as normative actor,

whatever the transfer or reciprocity form involved. Actors, norms and other categories remain on an invariant 'as such' level. Often, sociologists have allowed reciprocity variation into concepts like 'role', while retaining a static notion of the actor. Sociologists can be anti-positivists while still keeping to a wider, *meta-positivistic* framework, as is the case of Gouldner. They criticise the positivist notion, for example the disembodied, rationalistic portrait of interaction. Yet instead of rejecting the *way* such notions are presented, *as if* sociologists were in a position to perceive the social universe as a whole, they replace it with another, equally abstractist notion, for example of the embodied, gendered actor. This is quite different from a view that says, instead, that some kinds of 'traffic' make this division line the important one, while others put the emphasis elsewhere.

The wider anthropological angle is not surprising, considering the types of information anthropologists usually have worked with: small-scale communities where actors as much as actions differ from modern Western notions. It is noteworthy that another main area with similar contextual developments has been social psychology, often meaning a psychological approach that ventures *between* the fairly static domain of sociology on the one hand and a similar abstractist domain of psychology on the other hand.

Comparing the Western sense of self to that of India and Japan, two social psychologists argue:

"For many cultures of the world (..) the self is viewed as interdependent with the surrounding context, and it is the 'other' or the 'self-in-relation-to-other' that is focal of individual experience. An interdependent self cannot be properly characterised as a bounded whole, for it changes structure with the nature of the particular social context (..). [It] is linked with a monistic philosophical tradition in which the person is thought to be of the same substance as the rest of the world. (..)

An interdependent view of the self does not result in a merging of self and other, or (..) that people do not have a sense of themselves as agents who are the origins of their own actions. On the contrary, it takes a high degree of self-control and agency to effectively adjust oneself to various interpersonal contingencies. (..)

The descriptions [in a personal description study of Americans and Indians] provided by the Indians were more situationally specific and more relational than those of Americans.(..) The concreteness in [the Indians'] person description is not due to a lack of skill in abstracting concrete instances to form a general proposition, but rather a consequence of the fact that global interferences about persons are typically regarded as not meaningful or informative." (Markus & Kitayama 1991:225,227,228,232).

The authors address some typical epistemological problems in this terrain – if there is a difference, it is conceived as an opposition in modern terms, whereby a different sense of self easily comes to mean a weak or underdeveloped form of the self, a lack of self-control, agency, etc. As shall be shown, this 'inner area' treatment of the person has corresponded to some typical 'outer area' distortions regarding society.

## Transference and symbolic orders

We may keep to Marx's (1973:255) idea of circulation as "the phenomenon of a process taking place behind it" and yet conceive of the transfer process and its background in ways fairly different from his. Transfers and their connected activities may be studied as a communicational process, a reproduction process, or an identification process – different from Marx's idea of a mute work process expressed in a surface mechanism of exchange. Anthony Giddens' (1993:186) proposal that structural principles can be analysed in three dimensions, structuration, signification, and legitimation and domination, is relevant here.

This brings us to the symbolic order of the transfer and the way the transference field is constituted as a 'cultural material'. As in the case of 'practice' and 'power, social forms analysis emphasises the dissimilarity of symbolic systems in different reciprocity contexts. Notions like signs and symbols have different meanings too.

For example, we may view people basically as symbol makers. If we look at the extensional aspect of this notion, we find some fairly overt connections. There is a link between industrial society and a view of people as tool makers, and another between present-day information changes and a view that emphasises communication and symbols. As I said, this does not do away with the intensional aspect, even if it creates a healthy scepticism towards any 'as such' regarding the two notions. In some settings, the symbol maker view is highly relevant, for example when we study the changes that created writing as part of early civilisation development in the Middle East (Schmandt-Besserat, D 1986, 1976). In other settings, like the warfare in late European feudalism, it seems less relevant.

The main point, however, is that social forms differences exist *within* such paradigms themselves. They change the internal meaning of 'signs', 'symbols' or 'tools'. For example, we know enough of the symbolisation in the early Middle East context to conclude that the units and organisation of the symbolic, as well as its relationship to the rest of society, were all quite different from modern symbolic organisation. The relation between signifier and signified was not mediated through economic abstraction. As I said, this does not mean that no generalisation was involved; we are closer to the truth if we call it 'large-household generalisation' (cf. chapter 11). The changes in the symbol system that led to the development of writing were linked to the development of the large household or temple establishment and the need to keep stock of its inventories.<sup>14</sup>

In order to understand signs and symbols, then, general proposition will often be of limited help; here as elsewhere these propositions are often most interesting for the modern staging that they express, yet do not inquire into. Understanding 'signs' for example in the early Middle East context means understanding the social surroundings of communication, the functions of the household and the meaning of list keeping. In general, symbol analysis relates to wider analysis of what Simmel called sociality and to contextualisation of notions of symbolic and other forms of expression.

The difference between signs and symbols may be approached rather pragmatically as a gradual or dimensional one, much like the difference between system and structure, as is done in the present text. Symbols may be conceived as institutionalised sets of signs, usually condensed and simplified, as more conventional, pointing to the concept rather than the thing, more indirect or worked out, or similar (Gullvåg, I 1991:130pp.; Langer, S 1974:60pp.).

Symbolic creativity is a more central variable than commonly assumed by sociologists working with institutionalisation processes. This goes for gender-related processes also, where the notion of gender as code can be interpreted as 'symbolic code'. Still, gender and other main reciprocity relationships are only partially grasped in such terms. Their discursive aspects do not mean they *are* discourses, or only or mainly to be approached through communications theory. Diverging reciprocity logics, like reification in a commodity context or obligation in a gift context, create different communicational patterns, shifting the meaning of signs and symbols as well as activities and power.

On these grounds I take issue with the tendency towards '*sensuality fetishism*' where signs and symbols are equipped with powers on their own, as a kind of communicational transfer fetishism. It is often narrowed into a language-is-all focus. – I agree that 'symbolic constellations' like works of art (or, in a broader sense, gender identity) have contextual meanings, yet I mostly disagree with a view in which symbols themselves are equipped with it. Signs and symbols convey a larger *message*, or a '*figure*' in gestalt terms. The development of signs themselves is probably best explained by 'common ground' principles like condensation, centring on what is *common* and thus not so meaningful for understanding specifics of social life. While power and much else come into this development also, this is usually on the message level, not the signs level. This was debated in the 1970s: the alphabet is not a patriarchal invention, a music style is no guarantee for 'class correctness'.<sup>15</sup> Genres, styles, communicational and symbolic systems are used by many kinds of interests and convey different messages.

The postmodernist idea that signs only point to other signs mainly says something of money that only points to other money. Some deconstruction is in place here. There is a societal framework behind this idea and the related notion that the truth is in the surface, one of a more subtle and finance capital-oriented capitalism with renewed individualism and dissolution of class solidarity. This is the staging behind the free-floating selves, the "subjects-in-process" and much else that can be found in also in feminist versions of postmodernism. I agree with Judith Gardiner (1993) who calls it *repressive dereification* – as if society, politics, economy, etc. was no longer there, as if 'grammar' suddenly had become the great foundation of all.

Disregarding all this, it is possible and perhaps fruitful to align a social forms perspective from an information and symbolic angle, much more than is done here. As argued before, I think the basic figure would be the same, meaning that these symbolic forms would still differ according to the reciprocity organisation in ways that resemble, or are linked to, the variation of the activity organisation. In brief terms the main differences between giving, exchanging and sharing would still be there. Once more a basic assumption is that symbol-making and other activity go together,

that expressive forms cannot be separated from labour without introducing an illegitimate presupposition of alienated labour.

Therefore, different transference fields also involve different kinds of signification and symbolism. Not only do they refer to different phenomena, they also refer to them in different ways, and may be 'representative' or 'expressive' in different modes. In a commodity context, we would not only expect 'reflection', as a certain form of transfer expression (further discussed below). There is also a more reworked or 'transferred' symbolism which includes that which cannot be expressed in reflection. What is involved in this case is the specificity of exchange representation, and the ways in which the connection between sign and phenomenon are first broken, then reorganised and re-established in the commodity context.

Much of this has been brought out in discussions of *money*, the monetarised wage labour society that creates a "far-reaching process in which specific contents of the personality are detached in order for them to confront the personality as objects with an independent character and dynamics" (Simmel 1978:456). Money, as Marx repeatedly stressed, breaks up the '*specific contents*' of most things, including people, and reorganises 'particular' relationships as 'universal' ones. What is not so commonly known is that Marx (1978) also went one step further, starting a very prescient discussion about value's 'second revolution', its turning back to use value. This is the process that in its negative aspects can be connected Gardiner's repressive dereification, or in a variant term, 'repressive devalorisation' (Holter & Aarseth 1993).

Here the universalism of capital turns particularistic once more. It is no longer only the case that *the value relation loads the object*, or gives the object its meaning and social character. Now this objective character turns back and loads the relation.

This development can be found in an area like advertising, which has been analysed as a change in three broad phases in our century. In key words, advertising in the first stage presents the thing as concretely useful thing. Next, it is presented as a *socially* useful thing, in addition to its concrete use. If you brush your teeth with tooth paste X, you will gain a ring of self-confidence. Thirdly, however, this social meta message no longer needs to be stated. It is *there* just in the product itself; showing the product suffices.<sup>16</sup> Many traits of the current 'media visuality' can be interpreted in this framework, possibly with the addition of a fourth phase: it is no longer enough that the thing's sensual presence talks a commodity language, people must do so too. So we get these new (neo-Kantian?) things-in-themselves *plus* life style packages.

This turning back, the secondary revolution of value, is important from many angles. Theoretically it represents a contradistinction to (a) theories that fail to recognise the existence of capital *as* use value, instead assuming an *absolute divide* between the two, and (b) theories that simply take the loading of the object for granted, and go on from there. I think psychodynamic object relations theory is a case in point, although this discussion cannot be pursued here. Such theories fail to explain *why* the objects appear in such powerful positions, or explain it only on the basis of naturalistic determinism.

## Approaching 'the hidden other'

According to the discussion of the preceding sections, there is a limit to what can be said across social forms regarding social life in general. Methodologies that do not put emphasis on a critical examination of that limit, of the *local* position of the observer system, are apt to be misleading. I also noted that this kind of debate has been better known in social anthropology than in sociology. Anthropologists have faced an 'otherness' that has indeed forced researchers to consider how to understand it *as* something different. Recently, these efforts have also included more conscious attempts to avoid making it into *our* kind of otherness.

These problems are no less important in sociology, faced with modern society, only less acute, and it is no incident that they become acute *in the gender context*. Understanding *the self* is just as much involved in this as recognising *the other*, or understanding the self *as* other. The failures on these accounts have been deeply interlinked processes in the development of social science. To each image of 'the primitive' or 'archaic' on the outside or outskirts of modern society there has corresponded an image of the primitive inside.

The European treatment of 'savages' *as* children, like the white man calling a black man 'boy', is one rather overt example of this broad connection of inner and outer 'nature'. The connection is best approached in a historical perspective, where it can be combined with a 'colonisation of childhood' perspective, although the latter is not discussed here.

We saw that an understanding of power that isolates it from reciprocity easily becomes empty or 'politicistic'. What is involved now is mainly the link *from* power, power in capitalist society, *to* conceptions of reciprocity.

The perceived *reality* of other forms is influenced by this link. We do not face different reciprocities as options selectable at the mental supermarket. Most forms of power, at least above a certain level of development, *first* creates a terrain of how to understand 'the other', and only then, subsequently, positions the other within it. As is discussed later this is important also for understanding many forms of opposition to power, since the opposition often is forced to accept the terrain, while trying to improve its position within it (cf. the paradox of 'black is beautiful' as anti-racist slogan).

Examining this terrain is important for understanding how we approach reciprocity forms not from some external, objective perspective, but from our position within one of them. The development of the early modern and modern European view of 'the other', stretching from *Untermensch* to noble savage, can be seen as a paradigmatic case in this context. It offers a fairly overt set of examples; it is closely connected to the reciprocity dimension (and to gift relations in particular); it is also of importance in itself.

Only an outline of some main tendencies is given here. These are presented as stages, although they have also existed as concurrent tendencies.

At least five main stages in the European approach to gift-oriented societies can be identified. These are characterised, in key words, by (1) wonder, (2) repression, (3)

denial, (4) otherness and (5) identity. The latter three are most interesting in the current epistemological context.

*Stage one: wonder.* The first interpretation characterised by 'wonder in the face of difference' is represented in most works of early modern explorers and missionaries. These works often emphasised difference and highlighted 'deviant' details as a means of capturing the imagination of the audience at home.

It is typical of this first stage that deviance departs in all kinds of directions; it is chaotic rather than systematically construed, as became the case later.<sup>17</sup>

*Stage two: repression.* The second phase of repression, represented for example by the conquistadors in America, is interesting in this context mainly for two reasons. First, it shows how denial in practice, i.e. destruction of gift- and sharing-oriented societies, went before denial in theory. While this is fairly well known, one detail is not usually fully considered. Much evidence exists to the effect that the European commodity-minded colonisers *did* understand some of what gift systems were about, usually in the sense of being able consciously to exploit them, and bring about their collapse not just by external means, but also by using internal gift-system mechanisms. What followed, therefore, in the subsequent 'denial' phase, was not just a case of ignorance, but also of 'unlearning'.

*Stage three: denial.* I am using this term in the sense of 'outright ignorance' or 'overt repression of facts', since the fourth stage also contains denial, but in more subtle forms. Historically, the main form of this overt denial was connected to the rise of *social evolutionism*. Modernist philosophy like Kant's pure concept and Hegel's pure motion can be seen as parts of this process, which does not only refer to the advanced late 19th. century ideology of social evolutionism. Instead it refers to a broader view that went further than the feudal view of the heathen or the antiquity view of barbarians. Not only were the others robbed of their land, they were robbed of their time also; they lost their place in history. Social evolutionism refers to the general idea that even if 'other' patterns of society, like gift relations, might exist, these patterns belong to the *lower parts of life*, and thus have no place in a discussion of civilised, rational social life.<sup>18</sup> They belonged to the archaic, lower sphere. A new *system dynamic* appeared in which the modernisation of the one could only be brought about by the archaisation of the other.

When one considers the historical context of this view, it should be pointed out that the emerging commodity-rational ideas of social interaction denied the role of gift relations also for a much more specific set of historical reasons. In the early 19th. century, non-commodity relations were still generally associated with older forms of authority, feudal relations and patriarchal patronage.

While this historical context is less relevant today, and the treatment of gifts more subtle, it should be emphasised that one *main* trait of 20th. century sociology is the fact, simply, that it has seldom given much attention to gift relations, and thus in effect denied their influence. So as a structural tendency, the view in question is not at all dead. Even in recent sociology (e.g. among the neo-positivistic 'analytical Marxists') we may find gift relations for example in the family sphere classified under '*irrationality*'. The goods or services of a transaction may be perceived (and, indeed



*received*), materially speaking, but they are not conceived *as* gifts. As can be seen, the 'lacking gift' household theme discussed earlier (chapter 5) has a larger societal and theoretical significance.

*Stage four: otherness in a terrain of sameness.* "Our ideology of the gift has been constructed in antithesis to market exchange. The idea of the purely altruistic gift is the other side of the coin from the idea of the purely [economically] interested utilitarian exchange", Parry and Bloch (1991:9) argue in a summary of anthropological views.

This is not all, however. The romanticist view of gifts must be seen in the light of a larger 'realism', which I believe has been more important, even if perhaps less overt, within social anthropology and elsewhere. In other words: *surrounding* the romanticist view is a larger perspective which is best described as one of 'sameness'. This is best brought up by the very verb which has conventionally been used by anthropologists in relation to gifts: *exchange*. I have often wondered why gifts should not be allowed their own verb, which as far as I know is *giving*, not exchanging. Even if it is important, in this context, to note that the choice of the exchange term does have some good reasons, relating to the fact that non-modern gifts do not correspond to their modern ideals, are seldom 'for free', and so on, it remains a strange choice, and it is indicative of the larger terrain.

This is the case also since the exchange term gives some *directly misleading* associations, also in most of the contexts studied by anthropologists. Exchange easily leads to the assumption, first, that there are only two parties, overlooking that what is given from A to B often is reciprocated through C, etc., i.e. that some third party or *society* at large comes into it. Secondly one easily assumes that there are two distinct spheres, instead of one continuous relationship.

Many such cases of bringing the gift implicitly into the larger commodity terrain can be found, even in 'romanticist' treatments like Mauss's. I agree with some of Baudrillard's (1993:48-9) points here (further discussed in Appendix 3), against what he calls the modern "mystification" of gifts. Non-modern people know, he says, that:

"This possibility [of a one-directional relation] does not exist, that the arresting of value on one term, the very possibility of isolating a segment of exchange, one side of the exchange [sic], is unthinkable, that everything has a compensation, not in the contractual sense but in the sense that the process of exchange is unavoidably reversible. They base all their relations on this incessant backfire (..) whereas we base our order on the possibility of separating the two distinct poles of exchange and making them autonomous."

Yet that 'backfire', meaning that the giver is compensated, is not just a case of a gift representing an ongoing two-way relation, for this as I just said still means forcing the gift into the commodity terrain. *What do I get back* (or: *how can I be assured I will get something back*) is the unvoiced background question here, and it is this very line of questioning which belongs to the commodity terrain – not by itself, perhaps, but by the crucial emphasis given to it.



As far as I can see, the *typical* problem in gift contexts is precisely the opposite, namely, *how can I give*, including *how can I be seen as a giver*, since from there onwards the road is clear. *Society* will provide for me, whatever the receiving party does; my status, prestige and influence will rise. If the receiver does not respond properly (*not* always to *me*, but to society, by sacrifice, and similar), society will make him or her polluted or use other sanctions.<sup>19</sup>

To my mind, Mauss underestimates this aspect, which leads him to overestimate the reciprocal, dyadic aspects; he '*overloads*' the gift with determinative powers and puts too much emphasis on an idea that the gift itself has a 'spirit' which says to the other party: 'you must pay me back'. All this, I think, illustrates the thesis of *otherness in a terrain of sameness* fairly well.

As can be seen, Parry and Bloch's idea that the commodity form creates a romantic otherness illusion is fair and good, but it does not close the issue. Idealism and materialism are *twin forms* or philosophical end points of a wider sociological process, two variants of abstractism that have operated in tandem from their very beginning. The materialist version of this tendency either makes the gift into an *underdeveloped commodity* or ignores it altogether. The idealist version takes *the ideal use value* of commodities as its point of departure, and creates the gift as what the commodity *should have been*. While this is often a *wish* fulfilment, the first and most important tendency is simply a *fulfilment*, an extension of repressive practices in theoretical form.

This may be a rather harsh contextual interpretation, but it does explain (a) why the materialist distortion is concentrated on the transfer (gifts as *exchanged*, etc.), while (b) the idealist concentrates on the transference (gifts as things with *spirits*, etc.). Below these two, there is a common aspect which is also important, where the gift appears as slightly 'childish' object (also a play-like object, as in some of Baudrillard's writing) – either to be *ignored*, *devalued* or *idealised* according to one's perspective within the commodity form.

*Stage five: identity in a terrain of otherness.*

How is it possible, instead, to identify gift forms in their own terrain? What has been argued so far may be of indirect help, under the 'know thyself' heading, underscoring the importance of commodity critique as part of a social forms approach. We may try to avoid at least the more obvious projections of our own form.

These questions bring sociology back into view. How do we theorise families in modern society – not by importing theories from the outside, but in their own terms? As long as families remain an 'import area' in theory terms, many phenomena of importance will be lost from view (Holter 1995a). The same is true of gender. We may find, for example, that genders can be described as classes, or that class theory can be used as a point of departure for understanding the gender system. Thereby, however, gender phenomena are easily misinterpreted, or filtered according to a foreign terrain. We might turn the whole issue around instead, and consider the possibility that society at large including class relations should be interpreted in gender terms.

What is involved here is a willingness to take the local phenomenology seriously, and use it in movement from the bottom upwards – instead of forcing it into some ready-made theoretical framework descending from above. The local phenomena can be used in order to *create* theory that goes further than the locality itself.

Many recent contributions in feminist theory can be interpreted in this perspective. Some anthropological approaches move in the same direction, and I end this section by discussing one of them, Marshall Sahlins's (1987) excellent work on Hawaiian society before colonisation, which offers an example of how the institutional or substantivist tradition within this discipline has evolved.

In gender studies, 'relational' views are sometimes seen as the great blessing, and it is of some interest, therefore, that Sahlins uses his local phenomenology to relativise that concept.

Gift-influenced societies may be less relational, or at least less '*prescriptive*' or 'formalised relational' than our own society, and more '*performative*', in the view of Sahlins. This is reflected even in Hawaiian language, with substantives created from verbs more than vice versa, and with the social emphasis on creating institutions, roles, etc. from the interaction itself, instead of referencing a set of prearranged social structures. Sahlins outlines the performative system in these words:

"The relationship [of native Hawaiian culture] is even more certainly created by the performance, than is the performance guaranteed by the relationship. (In anthropology we hear of prescriptive marriage systems, enjoining unions between certain categories of kinsmen, such as cross-cousins. In my experience, the Fijians are a perfectly prescriptive example of cross-cousin marriage. All Fijians marry their cross-cousins. Not because the people who are so related marry, but because the people who marry are so related<sup>20</sup> – whatever their previous relationship, if any, may have been.) My point is that at the level of meaning there is always a potential reversibility between kinds of action and categories of relationship. Verbs signify just as well and as much as nouns, and the structural order can be worked as well from one direction as the other. All societies probably use some mix of those reciprocal modes of symbolic production. But there are systems with predominantly Radcliffe-Brownian movements: with bounded groups and compelling rules that do prescribe in advance much of the way people act and interact. Call them 'prescriptive structures'. By relative contrast, the Hawaiian is a 'performative structure'." (Sahlins, M 1987: 27-8).

Sahlins tries to identify native Hawaiian society on its own ground, and the important point here is that he also goes further, trying to create more general theoretical views from that basis. This is not only a theory issue; it is not hard to see that it extends into many other kinds of questions also, relating basically to *democracy*: "If *you* are allowed to say something about *me*, am *I* allowed to say something about *you* also?" Learning or creativity is itself connected to this basic democratic element. When local phenomenologies are allowed global implications, the result is usually a step forward.

In this case, I find that Sahlins's framework casts an interesting light on sociological theoretical systems also. Theories can often be positioned on the prescriptive/performative dimension according to how far the process is allowed to change the structure, how sensitive and flexible the relationship categories are, how

far they express the real processual context in which they are used, and similar criteria. The 'Radcliffe-Brownian movements' are certainly no less well-known in sociology than in anthropology (compare the case of the *sex role*). The emphasis on the verb (giving, exchanging, sharing) in the introduction to this text and in social forms analysis generally was inspired partly by Sahlins' analysis. Social interaction is not unformed (or uninformed), but it is not always 'bound'.<sup>21</sup>

Reorganised epistemologies are 'translation bridges'. They allow us to take the place of the other, and understand the world from that position. Now, as we look at back at ourselves, we may also understand more of the relationship. In this case, we may understand what has happened to gift-oriented social systems in their meeting with capitalist society, why these systems tended to break down even *before* brute force was applied.

As I said, gift-oriented systems are not two-way exchange relations with somewhat delayed feedback. They are complex societal arrangements where each process of giving exists in a long chain of actions that should not be theorised as *giving back* even if the net result includes compensation to the giver.

Consider what happens in such a system when the commodity logic of giving only to get back, giving only in return for getting something else, *exchange*, comes into it. What can be expected, then, is a break-down that resembles the 'domino theory' scenario: it falls apart, or tumbles down, like a set of domino pieces. Gift-dominated social systems like that of native Hawaii create wide open *gaps* that more exploitative systems can move into. To them, these are not 'gaps', but 'foreign relations', 'honoured friendship relations'. They may assume that a foreigner *is as great a giver and receiver as he or she is distant*, so that a very distant foreigner coming to their land should be treated like a chieftain or even a god, like captain Cook was in 1778.

A great giver and a distant one are related concepts, since distance means that more of society is included – not in the modern, anonymous and indifferent sense, but socially involved. The greater the distance, the longer the string of gift contacts, potential friends or enemies. By honouring the foreigner, this whole string of contacts is implicitly honoured also.<sup>22</sup>

Once more these considerations of the 'outwards front' have implications for the inner one. I discussed the 'distanciation principle' and 'the good distance' in relation to children and adults earlier (chapter 6).

Receiving, as Mauss showed already, also involves obeying, being obliged towards. On this background, the worship of the Europeans as gods or heroes that can be found in the Hawaiian and in many other cases was good gift strategy, even if it did not exactly work well in the face of capitalist, colonialist logic. In that setting it instead created a "cultural disaster" as Sahlins says. The capitalist reciprocity rule basically said quite the contrary thing – the greater the distance, the lesser the gift, the more absolute and terrorising the conditions of the commodity.<sup>23</sup>

## A thematic method

The elemental forms of giving, exchanging and sharing may be approached in at least three ways; as elements in a wider context, as themes or figures, and as holistic entities to be described so to speak from the inside, through their own conceptuality. The first method was used in the first part of this chapter. It is the most immediately intelligible one, but also easily the most abstractist. The second method, which can also be seen as an intermediate (and somewhat more 'performative') type of approach is discussed in this section.

As mentioned, the distinction between *theme* and *context* is often useful. Parts of the context become thematic by being perceived at a subjective level, recognised and more or less worked through. Thereby, contextual change, conflict and tension are partially expressed in themes.

The thematic approach starts from the theme as a whole, as a figure, in contradistinction to the contextual approach that traces the contextual extensions of each intensional element. The thematic approach can bring us further towards an understanding of a social form according to its own lights.

Some main points from gestalt psychology are relevant here. "A basic gestalt principle is to accentuate that which exists rather than merely attempting to change it. Nothing can change until it is at first accepted; then it can play itself out and be open to the native movement towards change in life." (Polster & Polster 1974:150; cf. the gestalt key line: '*when you accept what is, what is changes*').

The therapeutic agenda of change can be translated to trying to understand in the present context, and 'that which exists' can be translated to social forms *as themes that already exist*. We already have images of them, and even if these images are often misleading for reasons described earlier, they can also be used as points of departure. In the modern view, we easily imagine the gift as 'warm' while the commodity is 'cold'. Redistribution easily evokes an image of 'safety' but also 'unfreedom'. If these are partly deceptive, they may also contain truths. Instead of carefully following extensional patterns, the thematic method is one of allowing all kinds of intensional patterns into the theme and considering the figures that appear from them.

This is surely a method of 'jumping to conclusions', yet in combination with other methods it is important. This is all the more the case since we do not really have a choice in this matter. In fact we *use* the thematic method whether we like it or not; we 'figure' things out all the time.<sup>24</sup>

There is another important aspect of this figuration based on partial knowledge – namely a prior recognition of something *as* unknown.

In the rationalist approach, the unknown is in a sense outlawed, or even imprisoned by hypotheses and theories; it should not simply *be there*. Sometimes it is given a compensatory poetic license instead.<sup>25</sup> The relentless method halts, and the unknown is let in. This is connected to creativity, for creativity involves a release from the interest of the assumption.

## Three main themes

By considering the three elemental forms according to the thematic method, three associations appear that have a broad relevance both in historical and in contemporary sociological terms. Gifts are often associated with friendship and obligation. Redistribution has associations to justice and domination, while exchange is connected to freedom and exploitation. Even if all the three forms may be related to all these themes, the three connections are of main importance. All three themes have positive and negative aspects; it is their quality that differs.

One main reason for these associations appear when we consider the basic structural arrangement of the three forms:

*Basic form Primary transaction type Main theme*

Gift One to one Friendship, obligation

Redistribution Many to one Justice, domination

Commodity exchange Many to many Freedom, exploitation

I shall discuss the three themes in turn.

1. A *gift* usually emphasises the giver and receiver as individual units, bounded systems. This differs from the ration or redistributive good, which instead tends to emphasise the collectivity or interdependency of units as parts of a greater whole. It also differs from the commodity. One may say that the commodity expands on the individualist gift theme, yet it also posits it in a very different framework.

Gifts are usually related to inter-unit relations like friendship, but also hostility (cf. the glove as duelling gift), commonly at this one-to-one dyadic level, while redistribution makes the units' relations to some larger entity the main theme. With gifts, therefore, considerations of reciprocity ('Simmelian' considerations, so to speak) follow, while redistribution opposes the unit to the larger whole, for example in terms of one's fate, one's lot in life, or social justice. The transference field of gift transfers is tuned towards 'federative' and fairly egalitarian notions of respect and worth, and from early on, for example in early Greek historical traditions, gifts often play an *individuating role* vis-à-vis the more collectivistic processes of redistribution. This is true whether the individual unit is a household, a spatially localised group, a city-organisation, or a person; there is an emphasis on the individual unit obligation, and often also a dyadic relationship.

Therefore, the theme of *friendship* is especially related to gift transfers, not just due to this dyadic quality, but also due to the *voluntary* quality that usually goes with it, compared to redistributive systems. Individual units' gift obligations usually have a relative sense of voluntarism in this respect, and also often compared to commodity attachments. The contrast between *gift* and *sacrifice* illustrates this relative freedom. In antiquity, we find gifts associated with friendship, including the philosophical ideal of dialogue, with politics, diplomacy, and much else, and throughout there is a sense in which the donor and the recipient are partner and have a mutual relationship, which differs for example from the relationship of sacrificers to a centre of sacrifice.

Redistributive systems require centralism, while a gift system may be much more polymorphous, loosely and federatively organised.

The gift therefore also often marks a relative *distance* between the partners involved, like the diplomatic gift that signals guarded political respect. Paradoxically, distance and friendship are combined, as parts of the individuating tendency compared to the closure and centralisation tendency of redistributive systems.

2. *Redistribution*, on the other hand, 'collectivises' obligations, not only in the sense of a central system of exploitation, but also in order to impose collective justice on whatever else goes on. All three forms of relations can be exploitative; the typical trait of redistribution is to impose a standard, a collective norm, different for example from the personal exploitation that can be linked to gift relations. If gift systems and commodity systems create certain imbalances, redistribution may correct them. This 'corrective' property of redistribution is historically very old, as are the typical problems connected to it, like the problem of the personnel of the redistributive centre misusing the pooled resources.<sup>26</sup>

The attachments of redistribution to injustice and justice through history go together, showing the larger thematic association. Some sociologically interesting properties are displayed here, to the extent that sociology itself, *as* a science of institutionalisation (which may be narrow, yet important), is in a sense a true child of redistribution. *Accountability as such* is involved in redistribution, or *institutions as such*, as different from transfers. Once more, this is a very early theme historically, for example in the case of humanity's accountability in the face of the pantheon, as expressed in the world's first writing, mentioned above, in the form of inventory and redistributive lists. This is clearly different from the localised accountability of gift relationships, even if the federative and communal aspects of gift relations may also be extensive and fairly general, sometimes in opposition to redistributive accountability. When modern researchers generally find early historical institution-building on a 'religious' background, this is also an 'institutional-redistributive' background, combining ideas of fate and justice. Although redistribution-oriented systems played a greater role on their own, for society as a whole, in early history than later, redistribution continued to play a major role, primarily in two respects: as a means of state exploitation, and as a way to control and correct tendencies in the exchange and gift subsystems in society.

The 'liminal' aspect of redistribution also often involves *time*, life and death, while gifts more often are associated with on-going life or daily routines. This is expressed by the sacrifice as a 'refractive' gift, crossing over from life to death, mortal to deity, and also by 'ordinary' gift giving reaching redistributive proportions when they surround feasts of the dead (Wolf, E 1982:164) or of life and fertility.

3. Today, we commonly associate exchange, whatever its ills, with *freedom*. In early history, and also in antiquity, exchange was more often associated with exploitation than with freedom, primarily in the sense of trade and debt relationship exploitation. Freedom was instead usually connected to gifts and friendship. The idea of exchange as especially related to freedom therefore in some ways is meaningful only in a much later context, on the background of late feudalism. Yet it is possible that exchange institutions from very early on developed partly as a way of regulating between the

two former transfer forms, to create a new balance between them; redistribution is not the only form that has the capability to redress some of the problems of the others.

Often, exchange presupposes agents that may instead give, share or redistribute their goods. The contrary options are often not present: the participant in a redistributive system, especially, is often bound to the system. Thereby exchange relations are associated with relative freedom: there is a sense in which gifts and sharing are potentially there; whatever is bought and sold might also, at the discretion of the agent, be given or shared. Further, the commodity expands on the voluntary side of the gift. The relationship is not determined from the outside, by supervision from the centre, as in redistribution, nor by a heavy overlay of traditional or 'over-hanging' obligations, as in gift relations.

## Paradoxes of redistribution

Little has been said of redistribution so far. Some main traits and paradoxes of redistributive systems can be outlined. They are discussed in more detail later (chapter 11).

*Basic and advanced.* Sharing in some senses seems more basic than giving or exchanging – for example in childhood, or as a background element in most interaction. Yet sharing arrangements may also evolve in highly intricate redistributive systems, often more complex than gift or exchange systems. Such highly advanced redistributive systems may coexist with and be legitimised in terms of the most simple notions of sharing.

*Immensely adaptable.* Redistributive systems exist in a huge variety of societies stretching from hunting tribes to modern societies. Redistribution seems adaptable to just about anything, following in the wake of most social forms processes.

*Silent companion and main voice.* Redistributive systems often exist in the background, yet they are also often 'voiced' more effectively than gift or exchange systems. The early link between redistribution and the evolution of writing has been mentioned. Later, redistributive systems have often been expressed in the form of written law, while the others have been more 'spontaneously' regulated.

*Centralisation tendency.* Redistribution systems have a common trait, a tendency towards centralisation. This is also their common problem, leading to revolts, fragmentation and new arrangements.

*Stratification and class connection.* Centralisation from early on was connected to stratification. With more advanced class society, the redistributive system became a main means of state exploitation. In pre-antiquity, the origin of taxation can be traced through tributes and enforced gifts to gifts and sacrifice in early periods (chap. 11).

*The centre of moral and politics, the socially determinate end of transfer.* The notion of redistribution implies repetition, a secondary operation, distinct from the original distribution. This secondary operation is where redistribution comes into its own as a social form, since the first distribution is a shared attribute of different transfer types.



Often, redistribution exists as a *meta-transfer* on the basis of the results of other forms of transfer, creating their 'infrastructure'.

*An edge of institutionalisation, a main force towards institutionalised behaviour.* This was mentioned above; we may even define institutions *as* the patterns of a social form that are constrained by local redistributive rules. Considered as a transfer, redistribution 'refers back'. We may also say that exchange and gift patterns are surrounded by redistributive rules, or have such rules in the background, and are 'socialised' through this interplay. The *main reciprocity relation* (discussed below) therefore may be defined as transfers that have 'assimilated' this redistributive aspect. A prototypic example is the condition that traders and market participants must pay some proportion of their profits to the state.

## Limits of the analysis and other transfer forms

Some limits of the analytical framework are addressed here.

If activities and transfers are relatively irrelevant concepts, the social forms framework also loses relevancy. For example, activities and the use of their results may be so tightly intermeshed that it is difficult to speak of transfers at all, or even activities, as apart from other aspects of life. In such cases other frameworks may fare better. Yet it should be noted that the social forms approach may have some partial relevancy here also, and that many contexts that are not commonly seen as transfer-related may nevertheless be addressed in its terms. This is relevant for gift and redistributive contexts especially.

We may turn, for example, to a context of traditional patriarchal households, even an 'extensive power' case like the Roman family (Thomas, A 1976). Most economic concepts may now seem misleading; there is not really a distinct layer of transfers, transfer and power are two sides to the coin, and so on. Yet this usually still means that we can recognise redistributive and gift relations. These do not distinguish between activities and results of activities in the market manner, but the categories may still retain some relevance. It is only when we go into areas where these, also, collapse, that the framework becomes fully irrelevant.

This limit is related to the question of other transfer forms, in addition to the three mentioned.

Commodity exchange, gift giving and redistribution are three wide and well-documented main types of transfer, even if the first is often the predominant one in a modern context. All three kinds of relations can be found in our own society. Further, these are also often tendencies within relations, also in 'pure' economic or business life. If nothing else, commercial dealers know how to exploit gift transfer elements (for example in the medical business, where this practice has been especially criticised (Ross, J 1992)). Gifts are often treated as signals, door-openers, and exchange securities. In general, commodity economies have always had redistributive elements, usually including some form of tribute, duty, toll, or taxation system, as well as gift elements (cf. chapter 11).



If we accept the idea of three main transfer forms, one of them predominant in the modern world, the other subordinate, we may also ask if there are other subordinate forms, perhaps more hidden in the background than the gift and redistributive elements.

One possibility is 'sharing', which has been used so far in the sense of close, small group redistribution. In this direction we may also consider 'love', or, from a working class view, 'solidarity'. Sharing, however, illustrates the problems of extending transfer analysis beyond the three forms mentioned: we risk moving outside the proper context of the transfer analysis framework itself.

If a pattern of sharing exists as an identifiable social system, with some minimum of institutionalisation, congruence and specificity, it is hard to see how it can avoid being a system of redistribution, i.e. already included among the basic transfer forms. Sharing in terms of love is a similar case – either it is unsystematic, or it evolves into redistribution where resources are pooled at least on a symbolical level. A 'commonalty' is established, and for transfer analysis to be relevant, it must have some basis of its own and rules that can be identified, even if these are informal, like the rules connected to marriage. The partners should act for the common good; the results of these actions should be counted as parts of a common sphere, and then used according to its rules. My point is that this interaction is *either* fairly personal and unsystematic (or systematised in ways that are not grasped by activity/transfer concepts) – *or*, if not, redistributive in character. The same may be said of solidarity.

In both cases there is an important element of opposition to market logic, yet this opposition does not by itself qualify as an elemental or basic transfer form; rather modern love and solidarity are much more complex, multidimensional phenomena. They belong on the second level of social forms analysis, where *main reciprocity relations* are in focus.

Keeping to the first level, I conclude that exchange, gifts and redistribution are well known as principles of interaction on many levels, and that while others may exist, they are more diffuse, less well known and probably more peripheral. Modern non-economic or contra-economic categories belong to a more complex setting and do not qualify as elemental transfer forms, and should instead be analysed as reworkings or conglomerates of these.

Thereby the limits of the social forms framework are brought forward: there may be many forms of interaction where transfer and activity-related concepts are *not* the best points of departure, so instead of enlargening these concepts, resulting in an increasingly distortive, absorbent framework, we should instead start with something else.

What shall be highlighted in the rest of this chapter is the area in which the analysis *is* relevant, how it can be developed, and some main issues on the way. I move, then, to the second main level of analysis.

## Main reciprocity relationships

A social relationship like gender or class involves different transfer forms, and may be described as a *reciprocity relation* which is multidimensional in this sense.

Reciprocity in this terminology is a wider and more complex notion than transfer. It is a cluster of interconnected transfers, activities, transference fields and other traits and relations.

The first level units (activities, transfers, transference fields) are often clustered in a *hierarchy*. The reciprocity relationship is also often a power relationship, even if stratification concepts are seldom sufficient for interpreting the '*sui generis*' quality of these clusters. For those who find the idea that relations like those involved in social class, gender, or 'race' can be described as 'reciprocity relations' somewhat strained, it should be pointed out that reciprocities generally do not bow to the modern market ideal of balance and symmetry. Even the harshest vertical power relations like those of masters and slaves in antiquity not only *include* mutual dependency, but are often built around it, specifically as a means of regulating this relationship. The existence of exploitation therefore is not an argument that reciprocity does not exist; it means that some *ideal* forms of reciprocity are not adhered to.

Main reciprocity relationships – like class relations, gender relations and 'race' relations – can be approached as 'systems' in their own right, as is done in this text in the case of gender. Even if these systems do not exist in isolation, it makes theoretical as well as common sense to identify them on their own. They are interlocked but also distinct.

One of the most remarkable portrayals of the 'race' relationship that has appeared recently, Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* (1995:293), illustrates this point. In the many trials against Mandela and other freedom fighters in the early 1960s, the South African authorities attempted to enforce gender as well as race segregation. This was not always easy:

"The first stipulation was that there could be no physical contact between white and black prisoners, and [the second that there could be no contact] between male and female prisoners. The authorities erected an iron grille to separate [fellow prisoners] Helen and Leon (as whites) from us and a second partition to separate them from Lilian and Bertha (as African women), who were also participating in the [trial] preparations. Helen needed to be separated from Lilian because of colour, and from us because of sex and colour. Even a master architect would have had trouble designing such a structure."

If the two systems were here locked together in a quite literal sense, they also remained distinct. Mandela describes how a whole ensemble of 'race' divisions was erected in South Africa, extending into a general way of life and outlook of the world. He also shows its effects among blacks themselves – he relates, for example, how scared he was the first time he took a flight with a black pilot, since he doubted that a black man could fly an aeroplane. The system also extended into the most minute details of life, including prison life, where white prisoners might get one tea spoon of white sugar a day, coloured prisoners a spoon of brown sugar, and black prisoners half a spoon of brown sugar. The tendency that one main dominance and reciprocity system becomes 'hegemonic' and *incorporates* all the others on its own terms is well illustrated in Mandela's work.

A system like apartheid may be described in shorthand manner as an institution, which on closer analysis extends into a number of more specific institutional patterns. We may also see the system as extending into parts of the social structure. While 'levels thinking' is sometimes used as a surrogate for theory in sociology, becoming a barrier to grasping processes that run through several levels, it is important in this context. This does not only concern the general need to avoid a collapse of one level into another, or too hasty analytical jumps between what happens in a local context and what happens in a general one. It also has the more specific sense that the wider setting of the institutional reciprocity pattern often *overrides* the more concrete transfer pattern, creating traits that cannot be explained only on the concrete level.

Therefore the wider reciprocity relationship must be taken into account in the analysis of transfer phenomena, also as a means of avoiding 'transfer fetishism'. This wider approach was introduced in the second chapter already, in a critique of exchange paradigms that basically overlook the context of love and gender when analysing partner selection, reducing it to a utilitarian exchange like any other. This element is very noticeable in the transfer context, yet it is not the only one, and in order to understand what happens in partner selection a wider analysis of the gender system is needed.

Marx's work is at its best when he follows this methodology, for example in his careful distinction between a small-owner market model and a capitalist market model. While this division is commonly recognised, the importance of Marx's further distinction between individual and societal ('total') capital is not so well known or understood. In the present terms, it is an example of the distinction between the second and third level of analysis. It is related to the processes of meta-institutionalisation that are discussed below.

While class, gender and 'race' are the three main reciprocity and dominance relationships in the modern world, others also exist, like the age relationship. Their relative importance varies over time. Some become outlets of general opposition, like age in the late 1960s. In a dominance perspective, conflicts are seldom only direct tug-of-wars, there is also a constant sideways movement on both sides, a search for the most favourable terrain in reciprocity terms. This was discussed in the case of gift relations in the family sphere: the long-term choice of terrain may be more important than a short-term advance or retreat.

Yet the shifts of emphasis between different reciprocity relations also occur for more complex societal reasons. A well-known case concerns the different terrains of conflict in 'liberal' and prosperous times versus crisis-filled stagnation periods. Sometimes new reciprocity relations are enhanced as a way to achieve what could not be achieved through the 'established' forms of opposition, whereas the powerful invest in forms that keeps the opposition weak or split. As discussed earlier there is a wider logic to this, where both sides create new forms of differentiation as attempted solutions to their two sides to the stratification problem.

The similarity of the three main relations is an important point. The 'race' relationship can be seen as a modern version of an older centre and periphery dimension, while gender is our version of the patriarchal relationship. Centrality and patriarchy are both

established on new, individual grounds, with body reification as a main common element.

This interpretation implies a view of reification as an important element of the *meta-institutionalisation* of the era of capitalism. It is an element that can be found not only across institutions, but also across the main reciprocity relationships. While 'class' reifies people in terms of money, 'gender' does it in terms of sex organs, and 'race' in terms of skin colour. I am not implying that these are only variants of the same theme, or even incidental 'outlets'. That would imply an essentialist view of meta-institutionalisation as one uniform 'essence'. Yet there is no doubt that these relations are created by some of the same 'building blocks' or basic patterns. Moreover, these are highly important for the integration of different reciprocity relationships into one homogenous whole, instead of a mix-up of widely different social form elements.

Not much is said of the class and 'race' relationship in the present text, as systems on their own. This is in a sense a serious shortcoming, all the more so since the patriarchy analysis leads to a view of patriarchy as a *combinatory* arrangement, one of *connecting* these systems and the gender system. On the other hand, quite a lot is *implied* on both accounts, including a historical perspective on class and 'race' which is spelled out where it seems needed.

Class, gender and 'race' are not only different in terms of reciprocity patterns and typical transfer forms. They are also, partly for that reason, differently positioned on the *historical awareness scale*. It is common, today, to put 'race' in quotes precisely because it is commonly recognised that this is a rather local historical phenomenon, in many senses a modern invention, while 'gender' is quite another matter, with 'class' somewhere in between. Our view of gender in many ways resembles the view of 'race' in the 19th. century, as is further argued in the next chapter. We no longer derive criminal behaviour from people's skull shapes. Yet we are convinced that in order to change gender, body surgery will be needed.

When I argue that a similar process of reification is involved in constituting classes, genders and 'races', I also, by extension, argue that all these have phenomena that are *not reducible* to power or dominance categories. The formal arguments in favour of activity analysis in the beginning of this chapter can be further substantiated. When all is said and done regarding power, the class relationship is also a relation between different activities in a certain reciprocity form. The same can be said of 'race' and gender. I mainly go into this in the latter case, discussing 'sexed organisation' in the next chapter. There is a sense of 'connected interdependent difference' can be maintained throughout. Some forms of power theory have the curious consequence that leadership, organising, surveillance, overseeing or anything else in that direction is not a form of activity, but rather a kind of parasitic passive monitoring. I disagree with such a view. What is in dispute here is the legitimacy of the power of some of these functions, mainly those connected to money and the production sphere, the lack of real-term democracy, and not the existence of the activities as such.

The lack of in-depth analyses of class and 'race' in this text also has another reason. If the patriarchy perspective makes sense, much of what has conventionally been maintained in these areas does not. This goes for traditional class theory especially. The established knowledge may not be misleading on its own, yet it is misleading on

a more general level precisely for that reason – being posited *as if* these relations existed on their own in the first place. Gender and patriarchy analysis does not support that view, disregarding what the two others do in terms of each other, which I do not discuss, except noting that the issues of 'race' have generally been in an underdog position vis-à-vis class, which once more is *more* understandable as we bring gender into it. – So it is a matter of 'reorientation', as was argued earlier in general terms, regarding social forms analysis and existing paradigms of social science; the paradigm may not be 'false', but there is a major context which has not been recognised. There is scarcely any doubt that economic relations are important for understanding 'race' as well as class. However if the argumentation later in this text is correct, basic ideas of the economy will have to be revised. There is a certain 'homecoming' involved regarding economic theory, as is discussed in chapter 13. By this, I do not want to contribute to a certain tendency towards over-eager reorientation of just about all and anything into a widened gender or feminist framework. Possibly, gender analysis itself will be 'recast', in the future, by better 'race'/centrality theories or class theories. For now, however, the argument is one of showing that there can be no reasonable doubt that these two must learn some home lessons of their own.

## Institutional analysis

'Institutionalisation' in a broad sense can be used of all three levels of the analysis, meaning the establishment of regular patterns of interaction, or simply 'social structure'. However it has a more specific meaning on the second level discussed here, which is also the most specifically 'sociological' level.

Institutions involve some minimum common recognition of interactional regularity and establishment of rules connected to it. Yet the recognition and the rules may be hidden or unconscious. Institutions may be more or less thematic, acknowledged and formalised; what matters is the degree of regularity, not the amount of consciousness surrounding it. Basing the concept of institutions on the latter leads to an idealist analysis where only overt, openly acknowledged institutions are allowed in. The rest becomes 'deviancy'. Yet a deviancy like sexual abuse is also an institution, or more precisely a part of our institutionalisation of sexuality, and it is this kind of *link* that must be brought into light if hidden or illegitimate 'shadow institutions' are to be understood.

In many sociological views the institutional level is subdivided. In Merton's perspective for example, a theory of 'race' relations would be a wide range theory, while one concerning a specific institutional form like apartheid would be a middle range theory. Yet a process like reification goes beyond this wide range; it is even wider. The social forms categories are 'very wide' in this perspective. They go beyond institutionalisation to what I call meta-institutionalisation. The matter of verbs and nouns is an example. 'Giving' is not simply a special form of transfer. It is also a background element that gives related institutions a special form – especially when this element is emphasised in society as a whole. Sahlins' distinction between "Radcliffe-Brownian movements with bounded groups and compelling rules" on the one hand and "performative structures" on the other is another example of a division that obviously concerns institutions generally in society. A main point of the current framework is that the forms of signification, knowledge and discourse vary not only

with the reciprocity relation, conceived as an '*institutional chain*', but also with the form of meta-institutionalisation. This variation affects most aspects of institutions.

Here, however, we come to a difficulty which is highly relevant in the gender context. As has been discussed in the case of slavery especially<sup>27</sup>, institutional traits, institutions or even whole institutional chains may survive or be reestablished across social form (and meta-institutional) divides, retaining some wider historical similarity. In views emphasising historical change, it is often asserted that this similarity nevertheless does not 'mean' the same across epochs. But what does that mean? I discuss this in chapter 8 in the case of gender as a matter, first, of 'traits' *versus* 'organisation of traits'. Secondly I discuss the fact that an institution 'works' in a wider sense than the work or activity it concretely regulates, arguing that modern gender institutions are differently organised and work in other ways than what went before.

The wider connections of institutions are a well-known topic in sociology in the debate about functionalism especially. Yet the present framework is not functionalist. In the social forms framework, instead, functionalism can itself be interpreted as redistributional theory of social life: every institution functions for or towards a common centre, often seen as a normative centre, or a centre of power. A meta-institutional pattern like reification in the commodity context or obligation in the gift context is very different from this.

The wider sense of 'working' rests in the lap, so to speak, of reciprocity, yet it is usually addressed only in the normative or power sense in the functionalism debate, functionalism being criticised for jumping to quickly from normative or power intention to societal extension (e.g. Giddens, A 1993). Yet the *ways* in which institutions are integrated into society at large and relate to their social environment undoubtedly vary with the reciprocity setting.

Institutions seldom exist fully within the grasp of one kind of power, one transfer type, or even one reciprocity relation, but may often better be described as *compromise formations* as Bourdieu (1991:137-59) argues regarding science. Institutions' ability to allow participants to go between these and their consequent establishment of 'rules commonality' and a common ground for symbolic communication are important here. For example, partner selection institutions allow participants to pass between lonesomeness and 'twosomeness'. Families are a meeting ground for different reciprocity considerations. This aspect can be connected especially to the 'order' element of the transactional order, and to the redistributional infrastructure element of institutions that was mentioned above.

Much more could be said of institutions than what has been outlined here. I focus mainly on the meaning of institutionalisation itself, and especially the less well understood topic of meta-institutionalisation. First I discuss how the analysis itself becomes more complex on this level.

## The analysis space

The three-dimensional analysis space of social forms analysis was outlined initially as if power, activity and reciprocity were balanced in one proposition, one 'space'.

That, however, is only an approximation. In fact, each dimension posits *different* spaces for the others, and the whole, what can be seen as the probability space of the phenomenon, is configured through their intersection or overlap. A given phenomenon at a certain point on the power and activity scale tends to involve a specific reciprocity form also, while a phenomenon at a certain point on reciprocity and power dimensions often involves a certain form of activity.

In addition to such general patterning rules that help make further sense of the analysis space, there is also a general *priority* of the three dimensions. These all exist in two-way relationships, yet I believe one can also speak about a "main direction", a broad causal path.

As argued, reciprocities 'outline' institutions, and the reciprocity dimension in some ways transcends both the power dimension and the activity dimensions. In that sense, the main method is one of understanding the reciprocity position first, and approach activity and power next. In turn, the activity dimension often transcends the power dimension. 'Transcend' is not used here in the sense of *being above it* but in the sense of *leading out of it* into a terrain where no more can be said from its point of view.

In other words, reciprocities are seen as the widest or most general concept, activity in between, and power at the most concrete level of the three. While a formal case that each goes beyond the other can be established for all three, power in some sense going beyond reciprocity and activity, and so on, the real case is not one of full symmetry. It should be emphasised that this method does not imply that power or activity can be ignored when exploring reciprocity, but that modern forms of power, for example, are themselves to be interpreted in the modern reciprocity context. At the end of such inquiries we come to a point where activities go beyond power, and reciprocities in turn beyond activities.

In the view of Alvin Toffler's (1990), surplus power (societal dominance systems like those connected to gender, class and 'race') will in the long run *decrease* as commodity production becomes more information-based. This development also involves a gradually more human resource-oriented technical composition of capital. Further, it creates a predictable tendency towards ideologies of communication, grammars, signs, etc. as *the* basis of human life. This was mentioned earlier. These changes must, however, be seen on a wider background, where the reciprocity dimension as such is also increasingly acknowledged, if only haltingly, somewhat blindfoldedly. There is a foreground enhancement of information process and a background emphasis on reciprocity. As far as can be seen today, increased information orientation does not lead to a dissolution of the commodity form (nor of patriarchy), but it points to a reorganisation where reciprocity considerations carry more weight.

*Analysis spaces and 'possible worlds'.* I said that a shift on the reciprocity scale usually entails a shift on the other dimensions (activity, power) also. This is where problems begin, however, for these shifts are *qualitative*, not necessarily quantitative. If the relation between A and B shifts to a gift terrain, that shift does not by itself imply anything regarding their power balance, but it implies that the *type of power* changes.

Therefore, we must leave the approximation that social forms analysis operates with 'one' three-dimensional analysis space. Instead, we now see that each shift may involve qualitatively different dimensions, creating new spaces. The result resembles a '*possible worlds*' approach, yet one based on sociological probabilities rather than formal traits.

Consider the currently popular call for 'actor-oriented' sociology in this perspective. Anthony Giddens (1993), trying to combine actors and structures in the analysis, recognises that knowledge changes with position, and therefore writes of "the situated actors' knowledge". But what do these terms mean? Do they mean the same across the differences we have described? I do not think so. The situated character goes for sociology too. If we take our situated knowers seriously, we shall have to situate our concepts also. We cannot assume, for example, that there is a distinction between actors and structures that holds good through all social worlds. Sociological knowledge does not exist in a non-situational space of rationality. A similar problem can be found in feminist theories that insists on a situational standpoint, yet nevertheless makes (feminine) gender into a similar privileged space (e.g. Smith, D 1990). Instead we must ask what kinds of contexts create such views, in this case a disembodied rationalism on the one hand and an embodied genderism on the other. Why start with 'the actor'? What are the presuppositions behind such a line of approach? As I said, abstractism cannot be avoided, but the method can be one of reducing it as far as possible.

The probability spaces created by social forms analysis cannot 'nevertheless' be placed within some larger four-square table, or into some fixed regulatory framework. We are back to the fact that these spaces have the uncanny ability to dismantle all and any category; that life changes beyond even our concepts of 'change'.

One criterion for distinguishing between analytical spaces and associated concepts that are philosophically possible and those that are also sociologically relevant is the degree of *specified generalisation*, i.e. whether concepts survive through different contexts with some non-trivial meaning intact. This can also be phrased as a question of understanding *when* the concept is no longer useful as an approximation and should rather be left behind.

The multiple spaces view allows us to approach the current framework in more congruent or less abstractist terms than has been done so far. We may argue, then, that *one* locality on the reciprocity dimension, associated with the commodity form, creates two main axes or dimensions that can meaningfully be termed 'activity' and 'power'. That may not be the case of another locality. Throughout, we leave the idea that analysis must *either* have some larger, positivist grounding – or drown in a sea of relativism.

## Meta-institutionalisation and social form

Giddens (1993:376) defines structural principles as the "principles of organisation of societal totalities; factors involved in the overall institutional alignment of a society or type of society". In Giddens's view, structures should not be seen only as constraints on individuals' motives, or compared to forces of nature. "All structural properties of



social systems (..) are the medium and outcome of the contingently accomplished activities of situated actors" (op.cit. 191). He argues that the dual character of structures, reaching into society at large as well as individuals' motives, relates to individuals' "reflexive monitoring of action".

Is this true in all contexts? I do not think so. "Reflexive monitoring" speaks for itself, it is surely a narrow and rationalist concept of people's relation to their actions. Further, the relation of reflection to reification must be examined when such terms are used. Giddens does discuss reification, rightly connecting it to discourse (or even seeing it *as* a style of discourse, e.g. op.cit. 180, which I think is overdoing it), and he also notes that a main achievement of "Marxist thought where it has not relapsed into objectivism" has been to identify the historically changing character of social or structural constraints (op.cit. 179).

Giddens also argues that this involves changing "forms of knowledgeability", yet that line of thought remains peripheral in his theory, quite different from the methodology of social forms analysis. Instead he goes into the privileged space where concepts are no longer floating in the river of change but have instead found a larger solid ground. He constructs a *structuration rule* that supposedly stands above time, space and history. Yet we just noted one example of the *variance* that exists even on this level – brought up by Sahlin's analysis of Hawaii and its 'performative' structure. If Sahlin is right, Giddens structuration (and 'monitoring') will have to be relativised. In general, sociologists looking for the 'social glue' will have to recognise that the universal adhesive is not to be found.

Sociology is often most interesting precisely when it recognises this larger limit, and ventures into the question of what *kind* of limit it faces. What kind of social space is involved? Instead of looking for the universal social category it *halts* precisely at this very high level of theory, retaining a larger notion of change. This is where meta-institutionalisation comes into the picture, as a *specific* form of 'social glue'.

A classic statement in this regard is the one in Marx's (1973:106-7) *Grundrisse*: ""In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether that determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialised within it."

Marx goes on to discuss how even capital, in pre-capitalist land property society, has a landed-property character.

Marcel Mauss's discussion of markets in a non-modern setting deserves presentation in this context. Mauss criticised those who applied commodity logic, disguised in natural terms, to gift-dominated societies:

"This economy of gift-exchange fails to conform to the principles of so-called natural economy or utilitarianism. (..) Very great surpluses, even by European standards, are amassed [as described by Malinowski and others]; they are expended often as pure loss with tremendous extravagance and without a trace of mercenariness (...) Diverse economic activities – for example, the market – are impregnated with ritual and myth;

they retain a ceremonial character, obligatory and efficacious; they have their own ritual and etiquette." (1969:69-70). Mauss further argued that general motives of human behaviour are not to be found in "the cold reasoning of the business man"; "one had interests, but they differed from those of our time" (op.cit. 73). So economic transactions and institutions like markets in different societal settings are only partially the same phenomena, even if the market as an institution is one that he believed "to be familiar to any known society" (op.cit. 2).

While the idea that the wider *institutional context* overrides the concrete transfer is a well-known sociological point, Marx and Mauss went a step further, to the notion of a social form (or at least: its dominant institutions) that overrides the institutional context and particular reciprocity relationship. This second rule is often more important, less commonly recognised or understood, and less easily explained than the first rule. Institutionalisation is more intelligible than 'meta-institutionalisation'. The latter term refers to the processes in which the social form as a whole influences the quality of institutional relationships, conditioning institutionalisation processes themselves.

We met some of this in earlier chapters, where the transfer analysis was discussed in wider reciprocity terms, notably in the case of the 'sex object': not only an object or result of men's sexualisation (which might be explained on the transfer level as well as on the second reciprocity level, according to some views of the gender system), but also a way of making femininity subjectively present, a beauty object which is also in some ways a *subject*, creating a 'contested terrain'.

The concept of meta-institutionalisation concerns the character of this terrain, as opposed to one or the other position within it. In the case of 'race' and apartheid, we may recognise that this as-if terrain of skin colour (as if defining social subjects) is not the same as ethnic relations generally through history. Or we may note the related case mentioned above, that slavery in capitalism is not the same as slavery in antiquity. There are some basic properties that are wholly unique, belonging to the modern world only. Yet these properties are often quite hard to distinguish. One easily slides in one of two directions – either into ignoring them altogether, as is done in much sociological institutionalism in which it is misleadingly supposed that it is only the institutions that differentiate one social form or epoch from another, or into essentialism, presupposing some essential link that binds institutions and institutional clusters together.

"The nature of a given mode of production is decided not according to *who does most of the work of production*, but according to the method of surplus appropriation" (de Ste Croix 1985:40). Marx, we saw, argued in terms of 'domination'. In each society one form '*dominates*' others, which in his theory comes close to saying that it *exploits* the others in a wide sense – or, as a pairing of these, the 'dominant form of exploitation'. So whatever the actual contribution from subordinate or background form elements, it is the dominant form that will be seen as creative of wealth and development.

Although the social forms framework starts out with activities, it does not *presuppose* that activities are the basis of society. Different verbs may create different nouns. On a more specific level, relating to the modern world, it does not presuppose that the

expressions of capital, including activity *as* expression of capital, is *the* basic meta-institutional mechanism of modern society. Moishe Postone's (1991) thesis that capitalism is basically *labour-mediated institutionalisation* sets forth such a view. His work is refreshingly clear in its social and historical orientation to Marx' theory, and also applaudable in its emphasis on a general institutional pattern and the attempt to conceptualise a historically specific form of it. Yet the result, the thesis of labour mediation, is too narrow, and I also believe that the very idea of 'one' basic pattern is misleading. In the case of the commodity form, meta-institutionalisation exists in connection to *gender* as well as to monetary and other non-gendered signification forms, so it does not involve *one* quality in Postone's sense, but at least two, and through that, I believe, many.

Some later arguments must be anticipated here (cf. chapter 9). Commodity labour mediation can not exist without a specific *non-labour* mediation, in the modern world in the form of a greater *polarity* in which the labour mediation pole is only one. The other is associated with sex, gender, and desire. Weber's 'other side' of capitalism, its 'ethics', is also relevant here. So we must admit that meta-institutionalisation in capitalism at least involves a 'two-component glue', not just the one component proposed by Postone and traditional labour-materialist theory. Once more, this may lead to a kind of sociological alchemism, yet there is also the possibility – since "two is indeed a company" – that it may lead to a more open but also specific and empirically grounded approach to the meta-institutional patterns of modern society.

## Forms of perception

One main problem with the preceding presentation of social forms analysis is its abstract conceptual character, which is a paradox since the analysis supposedly should help dissolve precisely that aspect. And a primary reason for this state of affairs is that the presentation itself is distinctly unfair or slanted in favour of one social form. I do not, for example, tell a story. Nor is this a sacrificial text. It keeps to the terrain of scientific, rational exposition, easily giving the impression that when all is said and done, the commodity form and its abstract concepts are still *superior* and not simply different from the others. An injustice is done, since the other forms are not voiced or presented in their own terms.

This is a pragmatic choice in the present case; doing otherwise would entail both a new set of arguments and new ways of arguing, which might make the result rather inaccessible for the reader. The choice is not based on an idea that commodity form communication is the only one or that it has any special claim to truth and knowledge.

*Reflective, narrative and refractive knowledge.* In this section, I shall try to remedy some of this injustice. Consider the following model:

List-wise thinking – *redistributing*, classificatory conceptualisation

Narrative thinking – *giving*, relational/event conceptualisation

Identity thinking – *exchanging*, reflective similarity conceptualisation

It is not hard to recognise this model as somewhat schematic. All these three kinds of conceptualisation can be associated with each kind of interaction and are indeed found within them. Yet each may be more 'formative' or influential in one of them than in the others.

Such a model brings us to a terrain that can be compared to a minefield, and I shall discuss some principal matters first. I am thinking of the attempts to explain forms of perception and consciousness as *based* on materiality, activity, practice and similar, if not directly 'reflecting' then at least 'corresponding' to some form of 'basis'. Pointing to the problems in various idealist epistemological traditions cannot hide the fact that materialist epistemology, for example in the form that became popular among radicals in the 1970s, has been left behind mainly for good reasons. The fact that this 'basis' in the current view is the verb rather than the noun, may be a step forward, but it scarcely changes the main matter.

As argued, Alfred Sohn-Rethel's (1975) views on the connection between exchange and consciousness are important and underestimated. Yet they have also rightly been criticised, for example by Norbert Kapferer (1980:77-9). When Sohn-Rethel argues that "the elements of the exchange-abstraction are reflected (..) in the consciousness of the possessors of money as pure concepts because they are pure form-abstractions (though rooted in social being)", Kapferer objects that Sohn-Rethel's idea of the abstract thing that compels abstract thought "remains a prisoner of (..) reflection-theory". He also rightly rejects Sohn-Rethel's somewhat narrow insistence on money, his "reflection-schema of coined money". Yet some main points of his analysis survive this critique.

According to Sohn-Rethel, "exchange is an empirical event, but the *non-use* of the commodity gives the latter a 'non-empirical' and thus abstract dimension", what he called the "homogeneity of abstraction". He also emphasised that this exchange abstraction does not confront consciousness directly, but only *ex post facto*, as a finished result. This is the *staging* noted by Žižek, discussed earlier. Kapferer recognises that Sohn-Rethel's analysis does indeed go into the difficult kernel area of commodity theory, the commodity's existence as "sensuously suprasensuous thing". Sohn-Rethel also came back out with some genuinely useful categories, which is not to be said of everyone.

If various forms of correspondence theories have failed, one might consider dropping the whole issue. On the other hand, *not* venturing into the relations between praxis and thought entails quite a few problems also. The whole issue of 'interpretational' analysis, understanding a context from its participants' viewpoint, is at stake here. If we argue that social reality has no meaningful connection to the form of knowledge, the effect is to make anyone, whatever the context, think like we do – or make them 'unenlightened' when that does not fit. We risk throwing away interpretational analysis, including Weber's emphasis on rationality forms.

Gender studies are full of this kind of dilemma. For example: should we explain the fact that feminism, along with much of the current emphasis on gender conflict, is a modern phenomenon rather than ages-old, on the basis that women earlier were too uninformed or too oppressed to voice their opinions? Such explanations are not convincing; clearly, we must look in the direction of social, historical context, and

especially focus on *the ways* in which patriarchal conditions were established and fought over in different periods.

There remains, then, a broad 'correspondence' (as David Ruben 1979 argues), not to the material as such, but to the what Dag Østerberg (1986:72pp.) calls the 'sociomaterial', and not even this category 'as such', but as *formed* in the sense used in this text. I prefer to call it an *association* instead of a correspondence, with the 'free association' idea close at hand, which in this context can be seen as the 'transference field' of thought.

By this association I mean a patterning of consciousness and empathy which is *more typical* in some social forms contexts than in others, or more brought into the probability space of some forms than others. It is more typical since it *makes more common sense*, and it makes more common sense because it fits the *actual* commonality established by the transfers and the dominant reciprocity relations. One might go further and say that it is more typical because there is less negative energy, tension or conflict attached to it in the transference field, compared to various other interpretations of what goes on, but since this is not a psychoanalytical text I end here.

In this way social forms can be associated with forms of experience, empathy and cognition.

The terms 'reflective' or 'identity' knowledge, 'narrative' knowledge and 'refractive' knowledge are used for exploring this broad relation of praxis and consciousness. The three are associated with the commodity form, the gift form and redistributive form respectively. While redistribution, as an element, is commonly classification- or list-oriented, I find the term 'refraction' useful when this form exists on its own, intertwined primarily with gift relations, as dominant form of society. This is discussed in chapter 11.

This view entails that social forms influence experience and cognition by helping prepare the ground for 'ruling epistemologies' and the perceptions of reality and possibility. This seldom happens directly but more as a background process in a very wide sense. By such a framework I am not implying that other facts of life like power and activity differences have no impact on how people think. Yet I believe that the general 'background terrain' properties of reciprocity forms hold good here also, and so the common picture is one of power and activity differences creating various views *within* the larger perspective associated with this terrain.

'Reflective knowledge' can be defined as knowledge associated with the commodity form, specifically with the process of commodity fetishism or 'objectivism'. The subject position is created as an impression of the object position, and in consequence of the discipline necessary to place someone or something in this object position, *as* a commodity, *as* owned. The commodity, materially (sensuously) reflecting value, is a socially reflective object, and so this thought form can be characterised as one of 'reflection'. It can also be described as a reflexive imprint: the knower appears as knower in the mirror of the known, the subject in the mirror of the object. – Here as elsewhere a 'substantialist' labour value theory is not a prerequisite for the form argument; 'value' or not, the *social* identity of exchangers is established by the exchange of their commodities. It should also be noted that the distinction between

generalisation and abstraction holds good in this context also; reflection is by no means the only thought form able to generalise. Further, as discussed in Appendix 2, reflection should probably be approached not as one specific kind of logical operation, but as a typical clustering of several logical mechanisms, including (at least) 'relational' and 'classificatory' commonalty, elements that can be found in refraction and narrative forms also.

Another form may instead be characterised by 'refraction', a combination of list-like and narrative thinking, where thought patterns follow the lines of gifts and redistribution rather than those of the exchange abstraction. A refractive thought pattern 'breaks off and also into', it shifts stance or shape yet nevertheless continues. One may think of 'the moral of a story' which is part of the story and yet breaks off from it. *Narrative* may be seen partly as element of refraction, or close to it, and as mode by itself, typically associated with 'gift paths'. More is said of these forms 'in situ' in chapter 11.

By describing social forms in reflective language, we already, then, take sides with one form; doing justice to gifts might mean presenting the current arguments in narrative form, while redistribution would imply a refractive form. As I said, such a procedure would easily create a new set of 'translation difficulties' for a modern reader, yet it might also make more sense. In the present text as in most others there are also more subdued thematic treatments, including a 'narrative' thread for example in the gender and family formation chapters.

From the preceding discussion it should be clear that a 'social form is associated with a form of consciousness' view does not imply that consciousness is always mainly determined by this association. It does not entail that gift forms simply create gift thoughts, redistribution redistributive thoughts, etc. Different forms elements are at least potentially present in one social formation, and so we should expect different kinds of thoughts also. On a general level, the three categories can be seen as very broad approximations leading towards the canvas on which 'culture' is drawn. Social forms do not govern sign production, and may be of limited relevance regarding the evolution of signs and symbols; their main influence is in the overall orientation, 'the meanings of meanings', why anything is *for* or related to or representative of anything else.

This is not all, however: the more specific *sociological* significance of a category like 'narrative' lies in its ability to confer further associations, we might look for a 'plot', a sense of 'events' and so on; 'reflection' may be connected to other tendencies like 'abstractism', 'refraction' to still others; we may find connections also to different forms of 'rationality', that are present, perhaps, within one and the same institution. In another context I have analysed family communication, a trivial yet also very complex topic, from this angle, emphasising the fact that the 'sense of family' does indeed involve both narrative and refractive communicational patterns (Holter 1995a).

## Conclusion

Some further remarks concerning the co-existence of social forms conclude this chapter.

In a monolithic or one-dimensional view, an epoch or society is characterised by one social form only, and dominance means dominance within it, not dominance *vis-à-vis* other-form elements. The latter can only exist in a transition period or exceptional circumstances.

In a fully pluralistic view, on the other hand, a plurality of social forms exist; in our society, for example, the commodity form co-exists with the gift form and the redistributive form. The same thought may be expressed in terms of modes of production: different modes co-exist, and so capitalism may be a mixture of feudal, capitalist, socialist and 'household' modes or others.

These opposed views have some common properties. Both contain some truths, yet they also lead to undesirable analytical consequences. The monolithic view blurs qualitative differences and reinterprets them in its own one-dimensional scheme – for example, all conflict basically becomes class conflict, if class is seen as the dominant pattern of the dominant form. On the other hand, the pluralistic view easily goes too far in ascribing other modes or forms a reality which is not there.

So, if the truth lies somewhere in between these two proposals, what more can be said? Two main perspectives are used in subsequent chapters in order to analyse relationships between different social forms and form elements, one 'political', the other 'economic'. I use these terms in order to point to the fact that both are 'marked' by what they try to describe, i.e. to highlight the translation problem at this point, which can also be more broadly conceived as a filtering of experience problem. Still, they represent a step forward.

While the political perspective puts forms into a wider societal order through concepts of ranking, dominance, or power, the economic angle puts them into it in terms of cycles and stages. Both of these are obviously views on the loan, so to speak, from the main social form. Both are therefore easily misleading *as* general concepts. When we say, for example, that commodity relations *dominate* gift relations, where exactly do we get this concept of dominance from? Deriving it from some universal notion of power, beyond reciprocity and social form variation, will not do. Taking it straightaway from the commodity form, as seems a main 'reflex' here, a simple 'spill-over', will perhaps do up to a point, yet if 'power' typically means something different in gift contexts ('influence'?), it becomes misleading beyond that point. We see, therefore, that only some aspects of the composite relationship can be approached in this manner.

Even if the economic angle has the same kinds of problems, it usually brings the discussion somewhat further than the dominance view alone. We may conceive of different form elements as existing in specified economic and activities/transfers contexts, sometimes as stages in a cycle or zones within a wider transactional order. Further, different forms of power can be related to each stage or zone and to the barriers and openings between them. Yet in terms of the discussion above, is this larger order a gift order or a commodity cycle? How do we avoid assumptions that one form dominates the whole, which means presupposing a social form composition instead of analysing it? What kind of concepts can be developed regarding the relationships *between* different forms, that do not lead to illegitimate *a priori* assumptions?

We met this kind of problem in more concrete terms regarding the family sphere *vis-à-vis* wage work and public life, a relationship that can be interpreted both from the gift perspective and from the commodity angle. We may argue on common-sense grounds that the latter takes priority, yet once more this easily means closing the issue at hand. Commodity economy mainly is a type of expression, not a basis that 'moves' the world at large. We want to distinguish the analysis from apologetics, from the self-presentation of this mode, which precisely makes everything commodity-related 'dynamic' and anything else comparatively 'static'. The fact that this is the *expression* may sometimes lead to quite the opposite conclusion, since commodity expressions often run contrary to background conditions. The earlier discussion of femininity as passivity is a case in point (chapter 4).

As in the case of meta-institutionalisation, to which it is related, I do not believe that a general framework like that of social forms analysis can by itself deliver an answer in this debate. Its usefulness, instead, lies in the direction of being able to explore and investigate such 'overall' questions in more specific terms. This is done, later, in relation to gender and patriarchy, where more specific meta-institutional and inter-forms connections appear.

Marx's dictum regarding meta-institutionalisation is well known, if not in those words. He argued that one should go 'directly' to the heart matter, the central conflict-filled relation, in order to understand the whole. By analysing the direct worker-capitalist relation, the whole of capitalist society could be clarified. I do not believe that this is the case. Instead I find that this 'immediate worker-ism' resembles 'immediate feminism', with the same kinds of limits. Yet something can be salvaged from it. By examining colonisation and economic exploitation as the outer edge of patriarchal capitalism we discover more of its identity; by examining gender we recognise more of its inner edge, as we do by examining the class relationship. The method, then, must be one of focusing on the three together, examining how they are connected not only on a wide range theory level, but by studying intermediate levels or spheres and single cases, and especially these cases in their 'deviancy', their change and crisis moments, when they do not conform to the larger rules.

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<sup>1</sup> The question of whether communicative action is best approached as activity or *vice versa*, activity as a form of communication, is not addressed in this text. From the present perspective we would expect the emphasis to vary according to the societal setting. Three main positions can be found in sociology over the last decades. These are (a) the labour position where communication becomes peripheral; (b) the communication position which tends to marginalise labour (in many variants; normative (e.g. Parsons, T 1994), phenomenological (e.g. Berger and Luckmann 1972), 'cognitivist' and dialogue-oriented (e.g. Habermas, J 1989)), and (c) a feminist position that emphasises the relational, emotional and embodied aspects of the two former, approached as a whole (e.g. Gilligan, C 1982). I find this 'in-between' and 'beyond' position of feminist critique significant, as is discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>2</sup> This limit can be studied for example in the context of the 'threat of destruction of the working class' debate in England in the 1840s, discussed in chapter 9.

<sup>3</sup> An example is epic Greek *erga*, used especially of 'works or deeds of war' in the *Iliad*, often opposed to *epos* as deeds to words, and for 'works of industry, works of husbandry, tilled lands' in the *Odyssey* (Liddell & Scott 1982:269). The Athenians worshipped Athene not just for her 'handiwork' meaning 'concrete labour' in the Marxist sense but certainly also for very important *general* properties of her work as a work of/for the city, with various extra-sensual aspects evident already in Homer – even if



their way of *generalising* this concrete labour differed from the modern abstract one. – The dating of a work-associated Athene is probably old, since early cases of craftspeople worshipping her can be found (also outside an Attic context: *Od.* 6.233).

<sup>4</sup> Although some discussion of sociology and reciprocity is included in Appendix 3, much more was included in an earlier version of the current text, and has been dropped here, since it is basically a worthy subject on its own, while the focus in this fourth version remains on gender and patriarchy.

<sup>5</sup> Confer *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1972) which attempts a differentiation between the present-day 'serial' social form and a more group-like alternative.

<sup>6</sup> This is based on one of Hegel's own relational insights: the limit, at which something goes into *nothing*, and through this *becomes* something else, points back at its *identity*. It is the *Logic* (and the 'greater' edition of that work especially) that represents the methodology of Hegelian dialectics at its best, while his other works – that are more widely read – are less central. The *Logic* is not easily accessible, but it remains an amazing effort.

<sup>7</sup> Therefore the intensional aspect often means 'motive' while extension means 'effect'. This differs somewhat from philosophical usage, where intention often means connotation or the set of attributes belonging to a thing to which a given term is correctly applied while extension means the class of things to which a term is applicable. – On the other hand, philosophers have been known to use the words in the direction proposed here, as in Ingemund Gullvåg's (1991:130-1) discussion of Peirce, where intensionality is called "a mental attitude or orientation towards something". In this context, intensionality is a triadic relation between the object or thing referred to, the sign, and the interpreter. One may wonder if this triad is ever a true relationship, since an interpreter on his or her own is meaningless – it represents an epistemological 'Robinsonnade' to paraphrase Marx (1973). Intensionality and extensionality both include and presuppose a fourth basic position, that of *other people*.

<sup>8</sup> The extensional hypothesis, in this case, is the assumption that the economic man paradigm involves men's specific experiences or a particular form of masculinity. Showing that a particular group of men was involved in formulating the paradigm is not enough, nor that some homology exists between their life world and the world as conceived in the paradigm. Although 'proof' is seldom available in this area, the extensional interpretation must be able to point to *relations* between the paradigm and the proposed background, or at least *pattern resemblance* that goes beyond a few isolated traits. – These cautionary notes are important in view of the fact that most statements can be *discredited* by extensional interpretations, or made 'politically incorrect' on *a priori* grounds, etc.

<sup>9</sup> A similar argument to the effect that generalisation is not specifically connected to Western civilisation development has been made by Jack Goody (1993), who argues that oral societies have "logical systems that differ systematically from the logic developed in Greece", the such a system allowed the development of writing in Mesopotamia, and that "embryonic types of the syllogism" later used by Greek philosophy can be found here already. – On another level it seems weird that it should be necessary, today, to 'disprove' the preposterous idea that Western Civilisation created the capability for generalised thought.

<sup>10</sup> "Um den Begriff des Kapitals zu entwickeln, ist es nötig nicht von der Arbeit, sondern vom Wert auszugehen und zwar von dem schon in der Bewegung der Zirkulation entwickelten Tauschwert." (My trans.; cf. Nicolaus' slight variant in Marx 1973:259.)

<sup>11</sup> A main, and perhaps even paradigmatic case of transfer fetishism concerns bridewealth/brideprice and women themselves as transfer objects. I believe quite a lot can be said – and will be said, in the future – on how the modern sex/beauty object has 'enlightened' the theoretical imagination of anthropologists in this issue ever since the ridiculous Victorian-age idea that 'civilisation started with the exchange of women' – not only in the case of Levi-Strauss, whom many have attacked for his "phallocratic mystification of women" (Hartsock, N 1983:276) but, I think, also in the works of Claude Meillassoux (1981), Gayle Rubin's (1975) well-known paper on the subject, and elsewhere. Although

these views are briefly discussed in a concrete context in chapter 11, it is a huge and important subject that mainly falls outside the present framework.

<sup>12</sup> So we may even see 'dream working' as negatively connected to working – cf. Baudrillard's (1993:39) definition of work as "slow death".

<sup>13</sup> This difference is discussed by Marx many places, often in terms of how *people's power over each other* in capitalism appears as – and, in some senses, *is* – *the power of things (commodities) over people*.

<sup>14</sup> The evolution of graphic signs and clay figures led to the first known texts in the goddess Innanna's ('sister of heaven') temple ground, evolving into a mould, *E-anna*, 'house of the heavens', in Uruk (Edzard, D 1965:83).

<sup>15</sup> One rather exotic idea in the 1970s debate was the '*melody is progressive, rhythm is reactionary*' thesis set forth by some music theorists.

<sup>16</sup> This analysis was worked out by Marianne Sætre in an unfinished project on advertising.

<sup>17</sup> The adding of exotic detail and strong colour is a well-known tendency in antiquity already, discussed especially in the case of Tacitus' (1981) portrait of the Germanic tribes. Yet these traits, plus some overt moralising in this case, differ from a systematic construction of otherness as an on-going proposition *within* a world system. The world of antiquity remained limited in this sense: the other mainly remained an outer other, and therefore also 'radical' or un-construed. Feudal monotheism, Christianity and Islam, represent a further step, since the other was now in more principal ways included in the ideological world system. This is further discussed in terms of inclusive strategy in chapter 12.

<sup>18</sup> I am disregarding, here, the development of a modern, mainly "children, church and kitchen"-related ideology of gifts, since much is said of that in other chapters.

<sup>19</sup> This is based mainly on the many variants of gift relations presented in early historical material, some of it discussed in chapters 11 and 12.

<sup>20</sup> This remark is highly relevant also for understanding early historical kinship, as discussed in chapter 11. Generally, historians have relied on a one-sided structural notion of kinship, overlooking the rich material on *proclaimed* or 'performed' kinship for example in the early Middle East. Among feminist researchers this has led to taking *fatherhood* literally (e.g. Lerner, G 1986, also Pateman, C 1988), instead of focusing on the *claim* of men who find it advantageous to call themselves sons of some powerful person. This is no detail, since it has strengthened the misleading idea of 'father power' as age-old and the first form of patriarchal power.

<sup>21</sup> The idea of establishing identity in a terrain of otherness is ambiguous; whose 'otherness'? There are obviously many possibilities for 'repeat manoeuvres' of the kinds discussed earlier, only on a more subtle level. Yet establishing the 'other' *as* 'one', 'someone', also goes a bit beyond that. The otherness now may be her or his other, as well as mine; we shall *both* have to go through this vitally important process of seeing ourselves both as 'one' and as 'other'.

<sup>22</sup> One may compare the old three-day hospitality rule (rest day, drest day, departure day) in Arabia (Burton, R 1994:3) and elsewhere. The traveller must have time for a demand that seems to be universal: to relate the circumstances and exploits of the journey. This was not simply a matter of entertainment but a main means of orientation and keeping in indirect contact with the world at large. The widespread findings of cowrie (kauri) shells, often used as proto-monetary tokens (e.g. op.cit. 19), is one indicator of the extensive character of such networks.

<sup>23</sup> The effect of this rule usually involved a mixture of external-front and absolute-surplus-appropriation 'idiot rules', oppression, contradictions, etc. The colonisation of America and other areas would have been much more costly for the Europeans had it not been for this reciprocity form contradiction, which goes beyond power difference, as in the case of Cortez in Mexico, who could venture inland as enshrouded by the *mystique* or sacrality of the far-away stranger (cf. Clendinnen, I 1995). For another instructive case of early military/capitalist venture, showing how men and masculinities were *formed* in this context, cf. Englund, P 1988.

<sup>24</sup> This conception is even more accentuated today, since the superiority of 'figuration' or 'pattern recognition' is so well known that it serves as the basis of human interface design in information technology, using icons and visual symbols instead of the (symbolically speaking superior) command line approach.

<sup>25</sup> "Beautiful are the things we see  
More beautiful those we understand  
Much the most beautiful those we do not comprehend."  
Niels Steenson (Steno) 1638-1686.

<sup>26</sup> A well-known case is the complaint of Urukagina of Lagash in Mesopotamia ca. 2300 B.C. that functionaries were stealing from the property of the city's deities. Cf. chapter 11.

<sup>27</sup> Notably by historians like de Ste. Croix 1987; also M. Finley, O. Patterson.

## Chapter 8 The gender system

### Introduction

In our culture, notions of the body revolve around the sex difference, in an endless interplay of disguise, display, exaggeration and modification. How would the world look if instead of sex organs, the size of the *earlobe* was in the centre of social attention? How would we conceive of bodies, behaviours and experiences?

In gender studies, the sexual signification is often taken as an *a priori* universal fact. Bodies are sexed – not, for example, earlobed, and so this kind of question is not asked. Yet there are indications that cultures have indeed put more social emphasis on the size of the earlobe than on the difference of sex organs. In Inca presentations of the body, the perspective is often directed to the size of the earlobe, as a mark of class or status, while the sex difference is subdued.<sup>1</sup> Earlobe size was a matter of tension and conflict, for example on the Easter Island, where almost all the long-ears were killed in a civil war (as Thor Heyerdahl and others discovered). Sex differences were important in some respects in these cultures also. But when bodies were evaluated in terms of *power*, earlobes mattered more; the main bodily *mediation* of power and status issues was the earlobe.

If Inca science had copied modern gender research, it would basically have taken this setting as a fixed frame of reference. Of course people's thoughts, experiences and actions should be explained in terms of earlobe shape! And this would have been all

the more the case, if it was a science of the short-ears, eager to combat the dominance of the long-ears, who had *simply taken ear shape for granted!* Painstakingly, short-ear researchers would show the world how each and any social matter was indeed related to the earlobe question.

Whatever else, this thought experiment puts some problems of a feminist *difference* strategy into a sharper light. For a long time, feminist and gender research have been occupied, precisely, with combating the 'long-ear' neutralisation. It is only recently that researchers have started becoming aware that cultural and historical differences go *far beyond* the dualistic 'gender difference' usually imagined in this tradition. So, for example, in a new work on gender in Mesoamerican culture, Inga Clendinnen (1995:169): argues that "the notion of the 'war between the sexes' and the identification of the sexual act with violence or combat so pervasive in our world appears alien to Mexica [Aztec] thinking."

We may also look at our own history and reappraise some well-known facts. The misogynism of antiquity was not mainly a matter of bodies, but of minds. It was not 'phallic' in the modern sense; instead of surfaces, it centred on an idea of body substances and temperature, men's *minds* were held to be cooler than women's.

The purpose of the present chapter is not a step backwards to the neutralist framework. It is to show the ultimately constrictive character of the gendered alternative, and to identify some main causes of that constriction. My main argument is simple: when we dispel the myth that patriarchy equals gender, we no longer need to *overload* everything sexual or gendered with the burden of patriarchy. We do not need to constrict the analysis of patriarchy to the gendered framework, or attribute our deep-seated gendered notions and anxieties to other cultures or epochs.

Therefore I turn a common wisdom around. It is not true that 'patriarchy' is a special case of a much wider category, 'gender'. This wider category is in fact our own modern gender, a local and unique variant of the broader category patriarchy. It is a variant where sex-associated organisation has become a main *medium* and *signification form* of patriarchy. Our sexist vision towards the world at large and our misinterpretation of patriarchy 'as' gender have one main common foundation, a reification process which is perhaps more extensive, and at least far less recognised, than racism.

The argumentation puts the social forms categories discussed in the last chapter to use, broadening the commodity critique perspective of the first chapters. The modern gender system is interpreted as a main reciprocity relationship consisting of different and partially opposed transfers and transference fields. It is a shifting and often paradoxical form of signification.

Not only is gender 'relational', sometimes to the extent that just about everything else in the social world seems related; it is also an 'agenda of its own agenda', a category that simultaneously appears as subcategory of itself (Borchgrevink 1994). If gender means 'masculine / feminine', it cannot quite be kept at that level, but also appears at a wider level of opposition between the gendered and the neutral.

Throughout, it is a relationship deeply entangled with questions of *social identity*, which is one main reason why we have difficulties imagining a world which is not gendered. Gender has emerged as the major *familiarisation point* of modern culture, all the more 'spontaneously found' the more distant or foreign other matters seem to be.

The overall progress of this text, as discussed initially, is one from 'manifest gender' to 'latent patriarchy'. Yet gender is not only manifest; this term is meaningful primarily vis-à-vis patriarchy in the modern world. Therefore I discuss latent as well as manifest gender-associated phenomena, attempting an outline of main traits of the modern gender system as a whole, preparing the ground for the discussion of patriarchy in the second part of the text.

I start by reexamining the 'stratification' and 'differentiation' elements that are often mixed together in definitions of gender, and I examine the tendency where the supposedly social category of gender collapses into the perceived natural fact of sex. For the modern person, including the gender researcher, it is difficult to think 'outside' of what seems to be naturally given as well as logically self-evident – two genders consisting of a social modification of the two biological sexes that have always been there anyway. And there is always some evidence to be found in favour of such a view. Still, this is a view that obscures major historical, social and cultural differences. The critique of abstractism is applied towards models that slip from perceived natural fact to social institution, from logical consistency to societal arrangement.

People have ears anywhere; they also have sex organs. Yet the tendencies towards abstractism cannot be understood unless it is recognised that sex-related difference, unlike ear size differences, have indeed played some significant role in all known societies. I use the term *sexed organisation* to refer to this transhistorical category, and I distinguish between three main 'socio-historical types' of this organisation that have been of main relevance in our own history. Sexed organisation has existed:

- (a) in early non-patriarchal historical contexts where it had little resemblance to our gender;
- (b) as a subdued form of organisation in a patriarchal setting that basically expressed itself as a matter of civilisation among a minority, mainly men, being less interested in any sex divisioning, and
- (c) in a modern setting where patriarchy increasingly became submerged in the new economic organisation of society and expressed itself accordingly, as a matter of bodies and organs, transforming the sexed organisation thereby.

The chapter has three main parts. In the first sections I distinguish sexed, gendered and patriarchal organisation, and discuss how the dual level gender analysis (presented in chapters 2 to 4) may be further developed in such a framework.

A second part concerns the relationship between gender and sexuality, with special attention to recent research on the historical character of sexuality and the notion of sex difference. I address the seemingly trivial question of why it is that a person of

one gender is able to 'confirm' the gender of another, and discuss a 'ledge' view of gender identity.

The third part contains a discussion of the rules and dynamics of the 'gender fixation' in modern culture. Finally, I discuss the related notion of gender as class, and the more nuanced 'subclass' theories that have recently appeared in this area.

## Three forms of organisation

If my main arguments are correct, the differences between the modern gender system and those found in other contexts are large enough to warrant different terms. 'Gender' as in modern gender should be carefully distinguished from gender as a transhistorical category. Although this line of thought is common to many recent efforts in the field, no such terminology has to my knowledge been developed, or at least not commonly accepted. In this text I have therefore mainly adhered to the more common practice of qualifying the sense in which 'gender' is used.

In the discussion that follows, however, I break this rule, using two different terms, sexed and gendered organisation. These may not be very apt and the usage is motivated only by the need for clarity. The two are logically distinct forms of organisation. The latter concept is used in the broad sense of patterned relations.

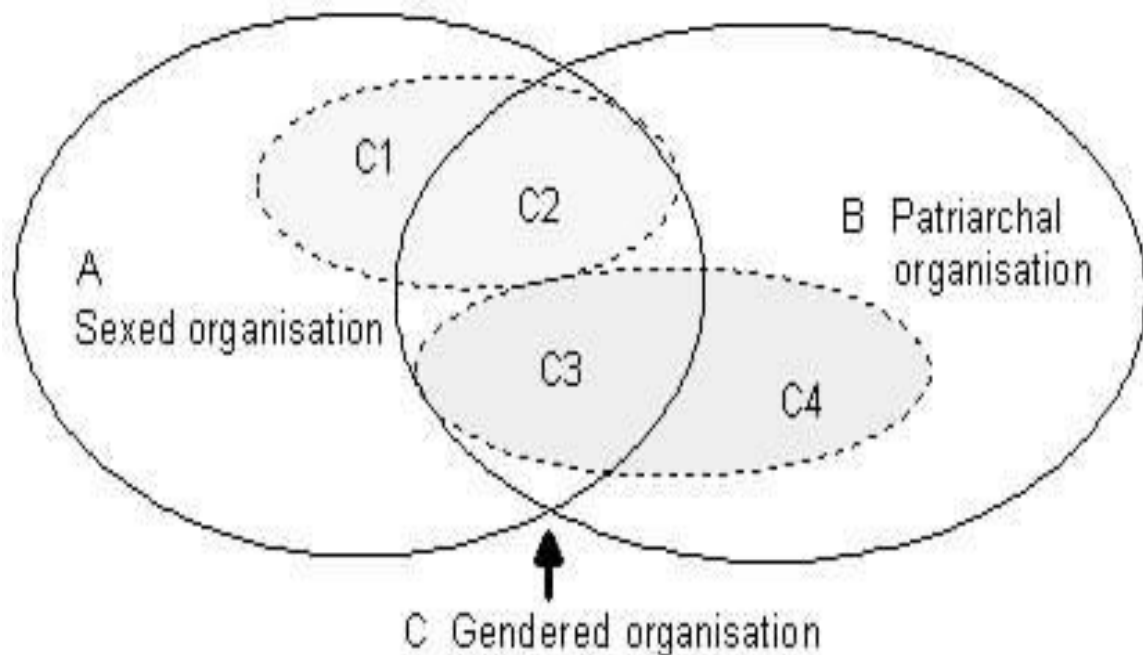
The point of departure is the fact that patriarchal relations, defined as those that in consequence lead to discrimination and oppression of women, are not identical to relations where sexual difference is given social significance. Many researchers have discussed these two different aspects of 'gender'. For example, Yvonne Hirdman (1988:51) argues (a) that there is a relation of dichotomy or sex differentiation, and (b) one of hierarchy or male domination. Yet far too little thought has been to these two categories, as if keeping them apart would be a futile endeavour, even creative of a certain resistance. In this case, Hirdman moves to a thesis (c) that stratification today is mainly brought about through 'segregation'. This segregation, however, is not sex difference as such, but a much more specific form of it, one with stratification built in, which she does not discuss. I agree with her view of a shift of emphasis from hierarchy to segregation in modern patriarchy. Yet I suggest a *method* of consciously keeping to the distinction between differentiation and stratification and carefully *disentangle* modern aspects from them.

It is quite clear that a system of sex difference by itself, even if massively segregated or split up, *does not imply* that one party dominates the other. A segregation of two parties by itself does not necessarily mean that one is above the other. *If* it does so in practice, we must find out why, and it is precisely here that the logical distinction must be kept. Differentiation and stratification, being tied together, exist in a knot, and if we are to untie it, these are the two threads we have to follow.

Some main relationships are outlined in the figure below. There are two partially overlapping circles, one of sexed organisation, another of patriarchal organisation (the sizes of the circles do not imply relative importance). The model rests on three premises: (a) relationships may differentiate between men and women without ranking them; (b) relationships may work in women's disfavour without

differentiating the sexes, even if indirectly bound to such differentiation, and (c) there exists an overlapping area of (a) as well as (b). The latter is the main locus of the gender system.

### 'Sexed', 'patriarchal' and 'gendered' organisation



The figure should be interpreted in the following way:

A Sexed organisation = related to the sex difference; a differentiation system;

B Patriarchal organisation = related to the oppression of women and others in non-patriarchal positions, a stratification system; and

C Gendered organisation = a historically specific *combination* of A and B. It may be approached in terms a '*stratifying differentiation system*', one that *tendentially recreates B through A* and reorganises A as well through this process.

The dotted circles connect the model to the preceding discussions of the dual-layered character of gender relations. As argued, gender shifts through different frames of meaning retaining two main levels, with two kinds of relations: dyadic gender ('male = female' in exchange notation) and gender-as-woman ('neutral = female'). Accordingly, the figure above shows to main levels in the overlap area C:

C1 and C2 = dyadic gender, related mainly to sexed organisation (A). C1 is the dyadic gender level which is in fact symmetrical or egalitarian. C2 is dyadic gender *as* surface level of the gender system. Further:

C3 = gender as woman, related mainly to patriarchal organisation (B).

C4 = 'neutralised masculinity' = that specific part of property or value which is in fact posited as equal to gender as woman (C3). This relation is seen as a *real abstraction*, expressed in partner selection and elsewhere in the gender system, as in the *she is, he has* formula.

C1 and C4 belongs outside the gender system proper, and C2 and C3 tendentially point to each of these (stippled lines). C3 is gender expressed as something women are, what women have while men lack it, women's reproductive capacities, sexuality as owned by women, and much else to the same effect. Note that 'has' here is operative only within the meaning 'is'; having is effective only within the category of being. This is not alienable property in the same sense as C4.

C4 seems to mirror this by pointing, instead, to production capacities. Yet C4 counts as gender only if forced into that framework (by, for example, gender researchers). C3 may be converted within the gender system, which in practice means there is a fluctuation of meaning framework between C2 and C3, but in principle not outside the system. C4 is convertible into other 'neutral' value outside the system but, in principle, not within it. The figure gives the impression that sexed and patriarchal organisation are both wider than the parts (C1 and C4 respectively) that are entangled with the gender system; this possibility is perhaps best left open.

These connections may also be described in more conventional language.

In a model of two partially overlapping spheres (logical classes) of sexed organisation and patriarchal organisation, gender is the subsphere created by the intersection. Historically and structurally, the gender system is linked to this overlap, extending principally in two directions, so that the gender system is larger than this subsphere alone and has a somewhat more shadowy existence also in each of the two other spheres. It extends into sexed organisation at large through dyadic gender, and to patriarchal organisation through gender-as-woman and its counterpart, neutralised masculinity.

According to this model, the gender system consists of the ways in which we create ourselves as masculine and feminine, yet its kernel is a *specific* subset of these 'ways', namely those that imply the primacy of the masculine and the secondary status of the feminine.<sup>2</sup>

This view entails that sexed yet non-patriarchal organisation exists also within our own society. I agree with feminists who have argued that gender relationships (in the sense of sexed relationships) are not necessarily patriarchal (e.g. Liljeström, R 1981; Crompton, R 1989). The principal differences between the two forms of organisation may be outlined. Gender is patriarchal, favouring men; sexed organisation need not be. As is argued later in this chapter, sex-related identity is mainly based on same-sex socialisation, while gender is based on cross-sex validation. Sexed organisation is commonly concrete and emphasises individual difference, whereas gender operates through abstract principles. The traits that are superficially similar between the two not only have different meanings, but become effective through entirely dissimilar processes. Yet this difference is often hard to pinpoint, since gender is an overlay, superimposed on sexed organisation, without clearly separate, non-sexed forms of expression.



## On the unique character of the modern gender system

The model presented above refers to a reality which mainly is historically unique, belonging to the capitalist age social formation, and even a fairly late or 'consolidated' stage of the latter. Some of its main traits are presented here.

*A requirement that women as well as men must be economic subjects in formal terms and to some extent also in real terms.* Exchange or other symmetrical transfers between women and men are meaningful only if both are independent actors, and not just objects of the actions of others. If we look at Western history in the capitalist epoch (i.e. from c. 1500), this has been women's situation only through developments over the last hundred years or so.

*A presupposition of individual agents in an exchange-dominated or exchange-congruent context.* Modern gender presupposes individual choice; gender as modern practice is a type of individual choice. It presupposes the general societal and cultural framework expressed in the ideology of human beings as free and equal. Feminist thought itself developed on this foundation, i.e. on the basis of a specific 'sameness' attributed to human beings. I emphasise *specific* since the idea that human beings are basically similar, and the like, is of course much older than capitalism. Now, however, a particular form of this idea became *effective* in a way never seen before.

The dyadic gender meeting celebrated in popular culture idealises this aspect of gender. There should be two full subjects in a just and equal social and cultural position, free to explore all difference and similarity, unbound by any discrimination or ranking. The unique individuality of each should reign, and their relationship to each other as genders should, likewise, be left to themselves to decide. If privacy is gendered, it is as a result (or should be a result) of this practical or functional decision-making of each individual.

*A reversal of main institutional relationships.* In a family history perspective, we may say that a gender grounded in family circumstances was replaced by a family grounded in gender, or with this as the ideal movement, with democratic, free, heterosexual love as main basis of domestic life and human reproduction. While premodern and early modern gender positions were commonly results of familistic decisions and circumstances, modern-day families instead appear as results of individuals' gendered decisions and circumstances.

*An emergence of gender as a hierarchic, competitive system which is effective on its own.* Performance of modern gender is competitive and hierarchic in character. The rating system discussed earlier is a hierarchy, interlinked with those of class and 'race'. Although such aspects existed also in premodern sexed organisation, they became *institutionally effective* on their own, as gender system aspects, in the modern context.

*Gender shifts meaning, and these shifts are specific and unique.* As discussed earlier gender interaction shifts between two main frames of meaning, gender as in male and female on the one hand and gender as associated with women especially on the other. At the same time, gender shifts between a generic and an individual and singular

frame. The *key role* of gender as a *link* between the individual and society at large is specific to modern society, or at least emphasised much more here than elsewhere.

*A specific type of learning connected to gender.* The overriding importance of cross-sex relations for validating gender has been discussed in previous chapters. This form of validation and ascription is mainly of fairly recent historical origin. In premodern society, more emphasis was put on *same-sex* establishment and confirmation of traits connected to femininity and masculinity. Cross-sex validation was less relevant and also easily polluting or degrading, for the dominant sex especially. This shift is further explored below in terms of 'gender confirmation'.

More particularities could be added, notably *a specific organisation of intimacy tied to gender validation*. The relationship between gender and sexuality is discussed in a separate section below.

The items in the above list are all 'organisational'; they concern a change in the ways in which concrete gender-associated traits were organised and institutionalised. Some of them reach into the meta-institutional level outlined in the last chapter.

Many discussions of how modern society changed older gender-related conceptions instead operate on a more concrete level. It is argued, for example, that whereas women had formerly been conceived as equipped both with a sexual appetite and a capacity for aggression, in the modern period they were increasingly seen as weak, passive and asexual. Premodern conceptions often 'break the line' from the modern point of view, like the Middle Ages idea of Jesus as mother (Herlihy, D 1987:12), or the widespread presentation in the orient in this period of Buddha with a woman's breasts, or the Mesoamerican evidence mentioned. These divergencies are not collected anywhere (with some exceptions described in chapter 11), and as I said it is only recently that researchers have started to become aware of them.

The difference between modern and premodern conceptions of sex-related traits is important, yet the background changes in the ways such traits were organised and attributed to persons are even more important. According to the terminology used above, a certain subset of older sexed organisation survived into the emerging gender system, and was changed and developed there. Besides such mid-level or institutional changes, however, there was a shift in the very 'mode of signification', a meta-institutional change. Such a major change hypothesis is based on evidence from many areas; material relating to sexuality and the conception of anatomical sex difference is discussed later.

The argument is not that all organisational patterns or concrete traits of the contemporary gender system are new. Falling in love, for example, is not a recent discovery. According to one recent cross-cultural study, romantic love, defined as "intense attraction", "idealisation of the other", "erotic context" and "expectation of an enduring relationship" can be found in most societies – 89 percent of known societies have at least one documented case, while no evidence was found in 11 percent of the cases (Jankowiak & Fischer 1992).

Things are rather more complex; there are old traits that serve new purposes and probably also new ones that serve old. We may perhaps say, with Foucault, that a new

system was *superimposed* on the old one, reorganising the latter rather than simply replacing it.<sup>3</sup>

What needs to be established, however, is the fruitfulness and legitimacy of discussing gender, not only sexuality, in such a framework. This means identifying gender *as* a modern subject on its own, without constantly sliding back into arguments about 'nature' and what has always been 'gendered' in some diffuse sense in all and any context.

At this point, a sidewise glance towards the situation regarding the other main reciprocity relationships in order. To the 'unreality' of subordinate reciprocity relations belongs the fact that they become associated with different time dimensions. This was discussed in chapter 8. Tendentially, anything closer to money becomes more modern than anything further away from it. We saw that this differential treatment also extends to current social science conceptions: while social class and 'race' are mostly recognised as historical phenomena<sup>4</sup>, gender can be treated as more transhistorical or archaic. Two other factors are important also. The reorganisation related to gender was in some ways more subtle than that connected to class and 'race'. As shall be shown, there are also social psychological investments in this area that easily create a perception of *threat* to personal identity when the granted status of gender is questioned.

## Gender as a dual sphere relationship

Not much has been said so far about the patriarchal background of the gender system, since this is the main theme of the second part of the text. Yet in order to give some sense of wider orientation of the gender framework under discussion, a few main traits must be outlined.

In my own early 1980s work, the gender relationship was portrayed as an expression of the background connection between two main spheres of society. These two spheres were not, however, defined in the two ways that were conventional at the time, i.e. either simply as the sphere primarily associated with men and that primarily associated with women, or as the sphere of wage work and the sphere of domestic work. Instead, I argued that the main *orientation of the activity* was the primary criterion. On that basis, I distinguished between 'inner-directed' or 'inner-objectivating' activity, oriented towards human resources, and 'outer-objectivating activity', directed towards non-human resources. This view can be summed up in the following model:

### Gender and the sphere division

<i>Sphere</i>	<i>production</i>	<i>reproduction</i>
<i>Activity orientation</i>	outer-directed	inner-directed
<i>Main value form</i>	monetary	gendered
<i>Gender representation</i>	neutral/masculine	feminine

Some problems of this model have been discussed earlier, relating to the activity focus and the value forms analysis. The model does not clarify the character of the

background sphere relationship, nor is the distinction between monetary and gendered value forms entirely clear. There is a 'now you see it, now you don't' quality to most gender categories, due to their shifting meaning and the fact that gender as a value relation is often outwardly indistinguishable from a gift relation.

Despite these problems, I believe that the model has stood the test of time rather well. The idea that two main activity orientations are expressed in the two genders has been confirmed by a huge variety of wage work and family sphere studies. The two orientations are often core aspects also in the sense of being the *first* main division line established between men and women, for example in the process leading to a couple relationship. Further, there is considerable evidence that the overall sphere relationship does in fact influence the gender relationship, as is discussed later. We have also seen that the model avoids the fallacy of 'direct identification', an idea that gender identity flows directly from the concrete task to its performer. Nor does it entail a basis / superstructure view where the gender system only passively reflects the activity basis (chapters 3-4). Even if the relationship between the two spheres remains partly opaque, the model has been useful for establishing some further ground for analysis.

It is sometimes argued that gender is a *purely* relational concept; it has no substance or content. While a relational view of gender has been important for going beyond traditional gender-as-substance thinking where relational traits were often straightaway attributed to the weaker party in the relation (women as passive, etc.), I do not agree with the relations-only idea.

Instead, I believe that it makes a great deal of sense to say that gender has a content, and that one main part of it, perhaps the main part, concerns activities. The two genders are 'scripts' for two main kinds of activity. As I said, this perspective has been confirmed by a huge number of studies, including micro studies of work organisations that show the persistent character of these two orientations in circumstances where one would scarcely believe that they could be implemented. Saying gender is 'about' nothing beyond itself or that it is fully self-referential therefore means missing some of the most important traits of the real-life gender organisation in our society.

Further, an emphasis on the strength of the association between gender and activity organisation does not imply a causal determination, or a view where people are 'really' neutral individuals until an activity division comes along and shapes them into genders.<sup>5</sup> The gender system itself exists in an interplay with a specific organisation of neutrality, of which more is said later. It is this *dual* form of organisation that has been superimposed on older forms including older sexed organisation. So we might as well say that people were *more* sexed, or *can* be more sexed, without this overlay which by itself is *alien* to sexed organisation, linked to it only in the sense of using it as a medium of expression and effectuation. The main point is of course not 'more' or 'less' but qualitatively diverging meanings of sexedness. Gold would not be more or less valuable by not being money; if its monetary role disappeared it would gain an entirely different kind of status.

In the terminology developed in the last chapter, we may describe the activity relationship according to the different transfer types involved in its regulation, and the shifting gender relation according to the changing transference fields associated with

these transfers. The definition of the transference field as an 'attempted solution' is relevant here, and often a main aspect of gender itself. It is influenced by the asymmetry of the two spheres, the tendency of the sphere of production to dominate reproduction and the counteractive processes created thereby (chapter 9).

The model can also be used to orient the three categories of sexed, patriarchal and gendered organisation. The kernel gender system, representing the overlap of sexed and patriarchal organisation, is primarily situated in the sphere of reproduction. This is where gender is directly effective as framework of activity scripts and most openly institutionalised. This makes further sense of the "grounding of gender system analysis in terms of family formation" approach presented in the first chapters. Yet by localising the kernel area of the gender system, we have not localised the kernel or central dynamics of patriarchy. Instead it is of major methodological importance that the latter question is left open and not collapsed into the former. We do not know its answer; so far, what I have described is the gender system and its localisation in terms of institutionalisation and activity organisation.

In the discussion above, two further, more latent gender system aspects were identified, one in which the system leads into non-patriarchal sexed organisation, and another where it leads to patriarchal but non-sexed organisation. These two extensions were connected to the two main layers of gender interaction, dyadic gender and gender-as-woman respectively. In sexual terms, the dyadic gender level is characterised by sex for sex, while the asymmetrical level is characterised by sex for money.

As a further step, these two 'extensions' may be conceived as cycles, or if one accepts a labour value view, as value circuits. The basic idea is the same, though it should be emphasised that these cycles do not only pass through the terrain conventionally associated with value. Disregarding the transfer form for the moment, we may say that one of them tendentially extends further into the reproductive sphere and into private life as a category *beyond* reproduction, while the other tendentially extends into the sphere of production and the public sphere. I believe that the two are distinct throughout different forms, i.e. existing not only in the exchange context but also when gender is activated in redistributive or gift contexts.

Rita Liljestrøm's (1981) concept of 'gender peace zones' is relevant for understanding the first pattern, which – at least in a gender studies context – focuses on a somewhat under-theorised daily life aspect of gender, namely the fact that people refer to sex differences also as socially meaningful beyond power or asymmetry. By arguing that the gender system is a 'stratificational differentiation system', I do not believe the above analysis can be classified as a case of forgetting the power aspect of gender; on the contrary, what is attempted is an analysis of gender mainly on the basis of patriarchy. All the more reason, therefore, to avoid the logically illegitimate contrary conclusion that difference *per se* means power or expresses power.

The second pattern is quite different, and the one which is targeted in the following analysis. We have met it in a variety of circumstances: in the 'she is, he has' formula that appears when the gender market relation can no longer be described as symmetrical and dyadic; in the emergence of the Beauty Object; in the exchange of women between men disguised in the exchange between men and women; and,

further, into the family sphere, extending into the 'traffic' between dirt and cleanliness in the home described by Borchgrevinck (1987;1995); in the background 'mother carpet' in men's life stories, described by Aarseth (1994); in the identification of the woman and the house discussed by Solheim (1995), and in other research.

At this point the problems of a masculinities framework also come into focus, for here men, *as* men, tend to disappear and drop off the agenda. What appears instead, is an 'it', something men 'have', which is not *per se* masculine.

The idea that everything feminine implies something masculine and vice versa, often found in gender studies, therefore not only is untrue, sociologically speaking, it is also a view that tendentially closes gender analysis off from a wider understanding of patriarchal aspects of modern society. It is not true that everything feminine equals something masculine, since in some major and even crucial respects femininity instead equals something neutral. We may find that 'property' is a too crude term for this neutral category. Yet it is certainly better than 'masculinity', for by designating it as masculine, we abolish, in the analysis, in the exercise of good will and abstractist reasoning, precisely the problem we set out to solve, namely why the feminine and the masculine and the activity spheres they are associated with, are not symmetrical or balanced. The terms 'neutralised masculinity', 'abstract masculinity' and similar are useful, since they do point to the background connection, but not if it is forgotten that this neutrality is a *social reality* and not a mirage created by masculinistic ideology.

What emerges from this analysis is a dyadic signification form consisting of two subspheres, one 'gendered', the other 'neutral'. In one, the gender relationship is qualitative only, in the other, it is quantitative. This should be interpreted as a tendential process: if the sphere of production *quantifies* the gender relationship, the sphere of reproduction *qualifies* it. 'Difference' tends to bend in one of these two directions.

The effect is one of a curious, inconsistent 'equality': if women and men are supposedly equal, and yet can be found in practice not to have reached that situation in each sphere, the gap between ideal and praxis and the inequality tendentially *disappears* in two main directions, towards quality and quantity respectively.

In wage work and public life, women and men are unequal due to a certain magnitude of wage difference, leadership difference, work conditions difference, and similar. In private life, they are unequal due to certain qualities, their inability to realise qualitative difference on egalitarian grounds, so that a symmetrical difference turns into one principally asymmetrical, containing at least a 'first and second', and usually a 'powerful and less powerful'.

In working life and in the public sphere, differential treatment due to gender has gradually become illegitimate. In the interest of equal status, society should counteract the known inequalitarian mechanisms prolonging the oppression of women.

Yet there is no law stating that women should not be discriminated against. What the laws say, instead, is that women should not be discriminated against *as women*. Thereby the problems of identifying patriarchy reemerge. No law forbids discrimination of women *as* foreign workers, low-level employees, routine personnel,

part-time or contractor workers, overworked mothers, etc. So instead of targeting the real situation, the situation is often only recognised as 'real' if gender comes into it. What is more, behind this understanding lies the silent implication that women *are* only their gender, since what counts is how women are treated as gender, not how they are treated as persons, meaning how they are treated as gender *and* in all other respects.

This tendency is often 'answered' in gender studies by making gender into just about everything: if women are only their gender, this gender means the whole world. In the 'derived subject' view of men (cf. chapter 6), men are similarly implicated only by their gender; what they do as individuals, as bosses of the low-paid secretaries, as bureaucrats and policemen who throw immigrant women out of the country, or anything else that *in fact* discriminates women, is not counted in this peculiar form of accounting.

The quantitative framework basically means gender disappears, while the qualitative one means that power disappears. With these double deals it is perhaps not so strange that the larger relationship is maintained.

## Explication and implication of gender

Two patterns or cycles were identified above: one connected to dyadic gender, extending into private life as well as sexed organisation, the other to gender-as-woman, extending into the public sphere as well as patriarchal organisation.

Different rules of explication and implication of gender, fields of 'talk' and 'silence' (Sørhaug, T 1995), are involved in these two. Explication of gender in a quantitative direction is generally seen as illegitimate wherever gender itself is the overt framework of the relation, in private life especially. As we just saw, this does not mean that women and men cannot be ranked or unequal in quantitative terms. It only means gender must not be made explicit as its reason.

Men's and women's ranking in wage work and other areas of modern society presupposes a *qualitative* identity or sameness and a *quantitative* difference on that basis. This quantitative difference dissolves into qualitative difference in the dyadic gender interaction, while the qualitative identity tends to slip off into the background, so what emerges, or should emerge, is the qualitative difference only.<sup>6</sup> We may even say that a *specific* dyadic 'expression form' exists at this point, a form where the two appear on the same basis, the same level, yet 'incidentally' the man before the woman. As stated earlier, the elementary exchange relation is somewhat chameleon-like, an '*incidental*' value form. Left to itself, i.e. not 'fixed' by other kinds of exchange relations (cf. Appendix 1), it operates incidentally, like a 'mixer', putting now one, now the other, into the positions of relative and equivalent value. Therefore it has the tendential effect of recasting any uniformity into seemingly chaotic or incidental variation. What remains is '*symmetry plus incidences*'. In this context we may interpret the often-observed experience among women that whatever is *not* symmetrical in a couple relationship is ascribed to one's own personal faults, while the symmetrical elements are seen as the social standard.

In this pattern, men and women are 'really different'. The essence of gender is difference. As soon as they meet, instead, in wage work or public life, they are 'really the same', measured by the same money, only the one seems to have more of that which is to be measured than the other. Now it is gender as a dyadic, qualitative relationship that becomes an object of silence, whereas quantitative aspects become manifest. Women are paid less well than men, have less power and are far less often represented among those with large-level economic property interests. The greater the difference, the greater the pressure to make 'gender' an incidental, not to be explicated issue. If gender appears, it is commonly as 'something about women' (as is fit for a pattern called 'gender as woman'). As discussed later, this is important also in a historical context. Gender in the sense of women was the main way in which gender itself appeared on the modern agenda, while the dyadic level is more recent, and the explicit notion that gender involves *men* as much as women more recent still. These changes can only superficially be explained in terms of ideology and power alone. They express wider societal and economic changes.

## Gender as subject of social science

At this point, some observations on how gender has come to be explicated and treated as a theme in social science are relevant. What can mainly be observed here, I believe, is not only a movement from gender as a women's question to gender as a dyadic question. There has also been a shift from a redistributive kind of gender to a negotiable one. Thirdly, the conceptualisation of gender through this process has gradually changed character from a discrete category within other social systems to a social system on its own.

The very idea of 'gender' as something *different* from the context of women and families ('women and children first') may be seen as a consequence of the bourgeois or 'nuclear' family revolution from the last half of the 19th. century onwards. The struggle for political and legal equality of women, together with other changes like the emerging consumerist individualism, created a gender category that became more socially 'real' – yet not fully 'realised'. We easily forget that even in the early 1970s, sociologists seldom thought in terms of 'gender systems', and when they did, it was a different kind of system than later.

Gender was conceptualised as part of a *sex/age-system*, quite dissimilar from the abstract level reached by much gender theory today. Before the 1970s, this system existed in the shadow of the family; today it is often *vice versa*. Gender was important in a redistribution-related context, connected primarily to the parent-child socialisation relation. Today we are in the process of shifting gender towards the centre of the social stage, often eclipsing 'class' in its culturally perceived importance, while a generation or two ago, gender was only a short step from nature, or a threshold to it, allowing instant switching to views of the human animal, inner nature, or the drives of sexuality. Gender was somewhat shameful or irrational, like sex. These attitudes can of course still be found, but they seem increasingly curious, out of tune with social changes. The *realisation* of gender as a specific institutional system, distinct from the family as such, did not come about in what I call 'early masculinatic patriarchy', but rather its later phase, from the late 1960s onwards, the time of 'the sexual revolution', with somewhat more 'androgynatic' tendencies (these categories are discussed at the end of chapter 10).



Creating a space for *gender studies*, one large enough even to include studies of men, has been a conflict-filled process in the academic world over the last generation. Even if the 'question of women' emerged on the agenda of social research in the 1970s, it was by no means automatically admitted that the old answers would not do. The thought that this question would have to be posed in new ways was even more foreign, not to speak of the idea that men were as involved in it as women. A main matter, therefore, as in other new and controversial fields of social research, was the admittance of the field not just as a subject of inquiry, but also as a *basis* for *new* theory and methodology; its legitimacy as starting point for questioning the rest of society, rather than only the other way round.

The tendency towards importing other theory into this new domain can be found also in the radical feminist writings of the period. The gender system, in my own and many other late 1970s approaches, was still halfway hidden behind, either, 'male dominance', or 'patriarchy' that was often used synonymously, 'capitalism', or simply 'society'. On the one hand, there was society, or men, or some of both, and on the other hand, 'the oppression of women', with little space in-between.

In my own case, the 1980 gender market study illustrates this tendency fairly well. While patriarchy was defined in terms of societal relations that in consequence lead to discrimination of women, the category of gender ('sosialt kjønn', literally social sex, as distinct from 'fysisk kjønn', physical sex) was based not on this definition of patriarchy, but on commodity and capitalist grounds:

"*Gender* is an impersonal and market-related form of interdependency; not between persons, but between persons as things, commodities. Physical sex and other traits (use values) become expressions of *exchange value*. Later, gender once more is translated into personal interdependency. The gender market makes this transformation manifest, from the most anonymous evaluation to the intimacy of the relationship." (1980a:204).

This is certainly an assertive definition, illustrating the tendency to import theory from other areas. It is also somewhat inconsistent in its own terms; exchange value *is* the expression of value according to critical value theory. One may even say that it breaks most of the rules of a *sui generis* approach: should not gender, first, be allowed some existence on its own, to be inquired into, before being subsumed under some greater principle? Whereas much was said of markets in that text, and some of patriarchy, it is interesting to note that the concept of 'gender system' was not used.<sup>7</sup>

Today, however, the situation is fully reversed. A recent informal mini-survey of feminist and gender studies books in Norway's largest academic bookstore revealed hundreds of titles with 'gender' – and next to none with 'patriarchy'. A database like *Sociofile* has 14000 references to gender, but only 400 to patriarchy – 3 percent!

If patriarchy is still around, it does not show up in these titles and references. Of course society and power on the one hand and discrimination of women on the other are still important themes. Yet the space in-between has become a large region with much research and many different theories, a kind of 'middle kingdom' on its own. Yet it is also one that often gives an impression of isolation, enhanced by a sense of gender being addressed in gendered terms in a huge circle.<sup>8</sup>

Rejections of 'role theory' have become almost habitual in gender studies, also by writers who display very little knowledge of what role theory actually was about – or authors who come up with the same lines of thought only in different terms. It is not correct, for example, that functionalist role theory necessarily implies a consensus or harmony view of society; Robert Merton's (1949) work is one main example to the contrary. The question emerges, therefore, *why* a rejection of role theory is so important. I think the answer can be found not so much in its specific traits, but in the wider associations attached to it.

Role theory was and is perceived as *narrow* and therefore an obstacle precisely in a movement of *extending* the field and definitions of gender. Some problems of 'gender' itself thereby also emerge. It is true that the sex role was usually described as a mixture of social and natural traits in role theory. Yet the role concept as such is purely social; it has its origin in theatre. Gender, on the other hand, is a notion where this mixture is commonly conceived as built into the very concept. Gender in its common definition as 'sex plus society' means human nature plus social reworking.

In Norway, where the debate about men initially emerged in the late 1980s in terms of the 'male role', this otherwise subdued aspect of the critique of sex role theory came to the forefront. Men should not, critics argued, be seen as if they just had a 'role' they could lay aside, as if masculinity was only some external choice that could easily be undone. – I do not know if anyone ever saw things that way. The main tendency, then as now, was not a too 'voluntaristic' view of men, but a too deterministic one, the old idea that 'men are men anyway'.

Relatively to gender, the sex role is a fairly distinct or precise concept, in the sense that it is obvious that people have *other* roles. With gender, however, *this is no longer obvious*. It is no longer evident that people are other things besides their gender, or act in other capacities. On the contrary, it is my experience that a statement like "it makes a difference whether women are oppressed *as women* or not" often evokes a question mark, with some head-shaking. What is meant by that? And – especially if coming from a man – is it not an attempt to flee from the realities of gender? Are not women women, and men men, anyway?

If gender thinking and gender systems theory have brought the field as a whole many steps forward, some not so peripheral problems of this approach have also appeared.

Ideas of gender as an overriding difference throughout society, often paired with a critique of anything tasting of sameness, have become more widespread in gender studies over the last ten years. One is at last allowed to think of men and women as different 'in flesh and blood'. What is meant by such phrases is not the literal meaning. The appeal to the body is an appeal to *sex difference*. Sometimes, this is explicitly opposed to patriarchy analysis, which is supposed to be outdated.<sup>2</sup>

In a paper on family theory, Helene Aarseth (1995:56) argues that "we need new perspectives on the relation between the man and the woman in the family. We need a concept of power which is not derived directly from the economic structures of capitalist patriarchy. (...) It is necessary to develop an understanding of the woman and the man as real subjects if we want a change in the relationship between them." The problem with 'real subjects' in gender studies is that it is easily narrowed into

*gendered subjects*; what is not gendered is not real. I find this tendency also in Aarseth's paper. She does not distinguish between men and women as gendered and as people in other respects, with the implication that when one studies men and women in families, it simply means studying them as gendered people. As for the idea that we mostly have 'direct derivation' power theories, it might be relevant fifteen years ago; today the tendency, as we just saw, is quite the opposite. Gender is very much in focus, while research on patriarchy and the economy has become marginalised and peripheral. Patriarchal structure as something *different* both from capitalism *and* from gender is the main under-studied area today, comparable to gender itself two decades ago.

One may argue that the tendency to keep gender squarely in focus is only natural and healthy in a recently started and developing field; moreover, a certain tendency towards 'periphery blindness' or over-emphasising the one uniting issue can be found in most fields, like youth research explaining most things in terms of age, violence studies explaining them in terms of violence, and so on. Yet I do not think this is all that is involved here. The extension of the gender paradigm is not only a process that may be observed in social science; it is expressed also in popular culture, in the media, and in public and private life in general.

Do these tendencies reflect the fact that gender has become less commercially involved? Or quite the opposite? I think some larger 'securities' in the face of turbulence are involved here, as is discussed in the next section.

## A 'ledge' view of gender

The gender system incorporates exchange, gift, and redistributive transfer patterns and transference fields and is influenced by all these three kinds of 'social logic'. The three are often accentuated in the vicinity, respectively, of partner selection, couple relationships, and the age and generational relationships associated with gender. Throughout these fields and their different oppositions of actor and acted-upon, subject and object, gender emerges as a position that both exists *between* and *beyond* these two. This duality, I believe, is of some importance for understanding the social psychological meaning of gender. In a societal perspective, we may say that gender relates to the private reproduction of economic subjects who are also, in various degrees, *objects* of economic exchange.

Gender can therefore be seen as an *intermediate position* in a meta status system, a 'ledge' between the category of owner and that of owned. This position can be explored in terms of 'having' and 'being', in line with some of Erich Fromm's late work, as is shown in the model below.

### A 'ledge' view of gender

<i>Category</i>	<i>Having</i>	<i>Being</i>
<i>Owner neutral</i>	Anything	Not a thing
<i>Gendered</i>	A self	Intermediate/beyond
<i>Owned neutral</i>	Nothing	A thing

The model should be interpreted on an exploratory level. 'Thing' is used in the sense of commodified, 'thing-positing' labour.<sup>10</sup>

Even if the categories are wide and diffuse, I believe some of the patterns that emerge are of major importance. Adults' act of positioning the new-born child as a 'she' or 'he', no longer an 'it', is as mentioned of symbolic significance in this context. Modern society does not give its members any lasting security against falling down into this abyss of the 'it'; on the contrary, such a fall is *implied* in many relations where capacities of people are socially equalised with things.

In the shadow of ownership is the existence of the owned. As a member of modern society, I sell myself for money, an 'it'. This sale no longer only involves my 'powers', my capacities; it has become increasingly personalised: I sell my self. How do I know *I* am not myself like this '*it*'? If the 'I' is each and every day posited as *identical* to the 'it', how do I keep a sense of self that is different from this exchangeability?

This is where the 'ledge' comes in. By being gendered, the *I* is situated above and beyond the level of things, it gains some security, a ledge. As we shall see, this third positioning, simultaneously between and beyond, is also significant on a macro level. It is related to the specific position of women in a patriarchal, class-divided society, not only 'below', but also 'between / beyond'. Further, it is soon obvious that this ledge of gender is not quite horizontal. It can also be described as a 'path' that sometimes descends almost to the level of the owned, while at other times ascending towards the level of ownership. It is different according to status, class, rank, etc., and also different for women and men. As a man, my gender often has the social psychological meaning of being 'on top of things'; as a woman, it partly puts me 'beyond' them, partly 'among' them. The two different main positions of the gender system, the dual layer of the gender relation, and their two main extensions or cycles may therefore be reinterpreted in this framework. With each shift in the gender positioning, there is simultaneously a shift in the position and meaning of the self.

The ledge framework also gives more sense to the preceding arguments on gender, love and freedom. When people in contemporary society are surprisingly occupied with gender, even though they want equal status and often believe that it has been realised, we may fruitfully look elsewhere for an explanation than to conventional answer that it only shows the remaining power of patriarchy. It is not necessarily the case that their occupation with gender is a 'brake' in the equality struggle. A recurrent theme appears: 'difference' must itself be differentiated.

In a world of expanding ownership, in internal or psychological terms as well as in external terms, the shadow of the owned also becomes wider and deeper, and the need to situate the self outside of this shadow increases. The paradox of attractiveness, in this perspective, is that even as it posits people as thing-like, to be evaluated in ways similar to commodities, it also *removes* them from commodities, by insisting on a specific 'language', a specific human-oriented evaluation form. And so, even when bodies and minds are drawn into this form and posited as more or less gender-attractive, they can no longer 'speak' or be appraised or accounted for in the common 'language' of things, *money*. Money not only is 'not there', in love it is that which *specifically* should not be there, should not come into the relation. The ledge gives the

human being a basis *as* subject, as subjective being, in contradistinction to the "people and things go for the same" logic of monetary relations.

From such considerations it also appears that the hierarchy of different transfer patterns, and especially the *transformation barriers* that exist between the neutral code of money and that of gender, do not only derive from patriarchal or gender-related dominance, at least not in a direct fashion. The feeling that *money for sex* and similar relations that break these barriers are somehow *threatening* or degrading does not only relate to the status of women, but to the general status implied in gender. Such relations break the 'human insulation' or undermine the ledge itself. If money is allowed to buy sex, or even worse, *love*, things become cold right to the freezing point. In principle it threatens *this whole order of subjectivity*, according to the present interpretation.

## Between being and nothingness

In the 1960s, Jean-Paul Sartre attempted a sociological contextualisation of his views on existence and objectivity. Although this is where his philosophy in my view became most interesting, some of his earlier statements are in a sense more indicative in terms of gender, and they are pertinent in the present 'ledge' discussion. One well-known passage can be interpreted in this setting, the section "The Look" in *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre 1988, orig. 1943). I shall briefly discuss some of its points. Examining objectification, a term he used vaguely in the direction of reification, Sartre wrote:

"My object-ness for myself is in no way a specification of Hegel's *Ich bin Ich*. We are not dealing with a formal identity, and my being-as-object or being-for-others is profoundly different from my being-for-myself. (..) The Me-as-object-for-myself is a Me which *is not* me, that is, which does not have the characteristics of consciousness. It is *degraded* consciousness; objectification is a radical metamorphosis. (..) Thus myself-as-object is neither knowledge nor a unity of knowledge but an uneasiness, a lived wrenching away from the ecstatic unity of the for-itself, a limit which I can not reach and which yet I am." (op.cit. 273,275).

Gender is where this object-ness meets subjectivity, or more so than elsewhere in the modern existence that forms the horizon in this text. Sartre starts this section by arguing that:

"*This woman whom I see coming toward me* [my emphasis], this man who is passing by (..) all are for me *objects* – of that there is no doubt." (op.cit.252). Yet that is certainly what is in doubt, a topic of concern, and it is not incidental that he starts with woman as the exemplary case. – My being for myself, for anyone, is of course *also* objective, my subjectivity is objective and *vice versa*; the objectiveness as portrayed here is not at that formal level (as he in fact recognised, later in this section).

Thus the text also makes sense as describing the gender ledge from a masculine point of view. Three levels are discernible:

(a) that of true subjectivity at the top;

(b) that of people, mainly as 'others', in the middle, and

(c) that of things, down below.

Sartre, seeing a man on a bench in a park, says he "apprehend[s] him as an object and at the same time as a man". (op.cit. 254). Had he been a non-human, a puppet, "I should apply to him the categories which I ordinarily use to group temporal-spatial 'things'. That is, I should apprehend him as being 'beside' the benches (..) no new relation would appear *through him* between those things in my universe." (ibid.).

Thus the person *as* object is degraded, thing-like, below the level of the other. It is this feeling of self which I believe is partially blocked out and partially reorganised by gender. This is perhaps especially connected to the *relative position* of gender, described earlier (chapter 4). This is the position of "he who looks", according to Sartre; who puts himself in the place of the other (Mead); who is in the active position establishing value identity (Marx). Existence, then, resides in the uneasiness *between* this thing-like level and "the ecstatic unity of the for-itself". One is always downhill from this goal of truly being for oneself, a wish to becoming *one* directly, without bothering with *others*. I also think that this is associated with the wish-image of *use value* created by the market, as the sphere in which one can be purely for and in one's self. This is in accordance with Sohn-Rethel's (1975) analysis. It is part of that which creates the 'objectivist' view, or the attraction of the sensuous material, according to reification theory.

Existence is a continuous 'wrenching away', a being set back by serial, anonymous interaction, a sliding downhill towards the ledge, typically expressed in the male aversion against being reckoned as masculine ('Why insult me, an individual, by such a generic term!'). Here, the anti-social aspect of Sartre's philosophy appears: the problem with the Other is his or hers (the latter, I think) power of making the subject into an object (op.cit. p. 275, etc.), since 'of course' the subject does so in the first place ("all are for me *objects* – of that there is no doubt"). As I said, that is precisely where doubt should appear. Saying "you are, for me, an object" is quite different from saying 'you exist objectively' or 'I recognise the objective fact that you, a human subject, exist'.

It is possible to go further and identify two kinds of ledge positions *as* existential positions in Sartre's view – one that remains below, *immanent* in this sense, and another striving towards the top, *transcendent*. The implications of this should be obvious, and I shall go into them here (cf. de Beauvoir, S 1961; further discussed by many, e.g. Mundal Johnsen, K 1979). In the present view, these *general* social mechanisms rest on a highly *specific* form of organisation. Although rejecting the notion that there exists 'one' key relationship that shows the truth of the whole system (cf. chapter 7), there are often specific relations that are especially linked to the social *form* in question, and we shall turn to these.

## Gender and the sexual system

"We have, it seems, been 'catapulted out of the sexual dark ages into a glittering age of sexual enlightenment and pleasure' (..) What we have experienced and are

experiencing is the fabrication of a 'sexuality' through a set of representations – images, discourses, ways of picturing and describing – that propose and confirm, that make up this sexuality to which we are then referred and held, in our lives, a whole *sexual fix* precisely; the much-vaunted 'liberation' of sexuality (..) is a myth that can be understood in relation to the capitalist system, the production of a commodity 'sexuality'."

So Stephen Heath wrote more than a decade ago in a book called *The Sexual Fix* (1982). Why is it, he asked, that we have this phenomenon called sex, this culture around it? What is the character of the arrangement called sexuality? How come it is there, instead of something else?

'Sexuality', it appears, is a nineteenth-century word, an archaism, though today we use it as if it had always existed – unlike, say, 'factory'. Sexuality was first used, in the first part of the nineteenth century, only in a strict zoological and biological sense. It first meant the quality of being sexed, having sexual organs, whereas later it gained a wider sense of sexual power. Heath (op.cit. 7-9) refers to the Oxford Dictionary of Etymology: Wycliffe 1382: "maal sex and femaal"; 1589 text: "a matter somewhat in honour touching the Sex" (women); 1792: "the sex of Venice are undoubtedly of distinguished beauty". In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the meaning of sexuality or sex-ability was widened, as is done by the physician Matthews in a 1889 text: "In removing the ovaries, you do not necessarily destroy sexuality in a woman".

Yet the modern meaning of sexuality cannot clearly be found until our own century, reaching public expression in the 1920s. "Sex-life" appeared in 1919, "sex-appeal" in 1927. An early entry is from the Sunday Express: "She has a large endowment of the 'plus' quality of femininity, the unexplainable but unmistakable flair called 'sex-appeal'". "Sexy" does not appear before 1928.<sup>11</sup>

Why, Heath asks, is our culture so intensely and even blindly focused ('fixed') upon this kind of intimacy, "sexuality"? His main answer is to see sexuality as a modern commodity. Although many connections exist in that direction, I think his answer may be more fruitful if rephrased; sexuality *relates* to the commodification present in intimate relationships. This commodification is in turn connected to gender as value form, as discussed earlier.

Most of the institutional arguments concerning the modern character of gender also apply to sexuality, as 'gender practice'; indeed, they are brought even more clearly into light in this area. Compared to other, non-modern, forms of intimacy, like the feudal age concept of carnal knowledge, the classical age concept of Eros, or pre-antiquity notions related to friendship, modern sexuality is peculiar for its emphasis on the *material* sex difference of the human body, and especially the *external*, outwardly visible aspect of the material difference. There is little doubt that the sexualisation of the body has been connected to the rise of the new form of political economy discussed earlier in terms of gender attractiveness and the gender market.

The idea that sexuality was not as universal as usually supposed first emerged with force in Foucault's late 1970s work, which Heath and others followed up. In a work that meticulously traces public and literary views of intimate inclinations from the early Bible texts through antiquity and the Middle Ages, John Boswell (1980)



concludes that active prosecution of same-sex intimacy among men was rare before the crusade period. He presents much empirical material supporting Foucault's thesis that a systematic construction of the 'homosexual' did not exist until much later, the 19th. century.

Today, these works emerge as pioneer efforts, yet it is also puzzling how, even in this new tradition of re-examining sex, *sex* as in difference, as *man and woman*, was curiously absent. It was absent both in the sense of *women* being specifically missing from the argument, and in the wider sense of an absence of appreciation of the general importance of gender for sexuality. As a result, there is little analysis of how the relationships between the sexes and patriarchal inequality have been a main patterning force in relations of intimacy, also intimacy within the same sex. In retrospective, it is not hard to see that some of this narrowness stemmed from the 'homosociality' of this tradition (Eribon 1989).

In a paper written in 1982 on the history of sexuality from the early modern period onwards (Holter 1982b) I tried to correct this tendency while developing the central insights of the new framework. I argued that the disciplinary patterns turning earlier eroticism and intimacy into sexuality were mainly connected to the emerging gender system, not to suppression of homosexuals *per se*. Using Marx's concepts of 'formal' versus 'real' subordination, i.e. bourgeois domination before and after the advent of large-scale industry (cf. chapter 13), I distinguished between two main phases of this process. The first was a phase of 'formal' subordination mainly on the level of religion (Luther, Calvin, etc.), philosophy, morality (Rousseau, etc.) and other public discourse. It was a normative development while the household and family arrangements remained traditional. Only after this 'preparatory' phase, resembling the pre-industrial capitalist production process, was there a shift towards a *realisation* of a *new* organisation of reproduction. The rise of the nuclear family and the dissolution of direct patriarchal authority created a massive shift comparable to the changes brought about through industry. Only over the last hundred years or so has this new pattern developed into a realised, institutional system effective on its own. The new words like 'the unmistakable flair called sex appeal' are indicative not because the *phenomenon* had not existed before, but because it now became a central *sociological* phenomenon, an 'enabled' capacity. This development led to the gradually increasing emphasis on the *dyadic* gender system level and eventually to a more manifest gender market.<sup>12</sup>

My emphasis on gender, now as then, is not to deny Heath's idea that the sex commodity has had a life of its own. For example, the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s should be seen on the background not just of gender, but also of changes in the relationships of production, consumption and desire, changing age relations and much else. The sexual system, including the forces of repression of sex, has had a dynamic of its own, even if today, somehow, it seems much like a spent force, as if its arrival in the world of commercialism, set free from that of authority, robbed it of much of whatever was there. This may be a superficial observation, yet this surface aspect is of some interest also, in light of the earlier discussion of the 'syncretistic' or absorbent aspects of the gender paradigm. Not only is it true that the gender system remains a main sexual constraint and framework, that the 'traffic in women' described in Gayle Rubin's (1975) pioneer work continues as a central element of any traffic in sex commodities, as in sex travels and prostitution (Holter & Sætre 1990). It is also



true that sex itself has become further 'engendered' in the public consciousness. The discourse on 'sexuality as such' which occupied the public mind in the 1960s, connected, *nota bene*, to *age*, the *youth revolt*, has been swallowed, like much else, by the larger gender discourse. It is indicative of the speed of this process, on a greater historical horizon, that today it seems strange that anyone could ever connect sex primarily to *age* rather than gender.

In a somewhat 'cultural' yet fairly real sense, therefore, it is utterly unnecessary to prove that sexuality is about validating gender, that '*the big O*' of orgasm that Heath described functions as a kind of attractiveness teller. Everyone knows this anyway, or will shortly learn it if they turn on their TV. We know to the point of boredom (and more seriously, to the point of body-distortive diseases like anorexia), that sexuality tendentially overloads the sex-differential aspects of bodies, while all other kinds of difference and existence are pushed into the shadows. For example, many researchers have investigated how such tendencies are emphasised in pornography, with a loss of intersubjectivity and 'You / I-relationships' replaced by 'It / Me-relationships', a loss which is evidenced on men's side also (Brod, H 1988; Kimmel, M 1990).

"Sexuality therefore can be seen as the valorisation of gender; it is the class of actions that through their use value character, emphasise the opposite, namely the value character of the interaction" (Holter 1986c:8, my trans.). This may be true if we reserve 'sexuality' for societal and cultural constraints on what people actually *do* in intimate relations, keeping in mind that 'sexed organisation' remains a wider category also when bodies connect. Yet what emerges today is also the way such a definition feeds into the theme of gender, a gender expanding into a framework for explaining just about anything; could it be, in the shadows, that something is also lost through such an explanation? As discussed earlier in the case of MacKinnon's association of sexuality and aggression against women, the genderisation of the discourse on sexuality also has meant that certain ground rules of sexuality are, just, 'to be observed', not touched. The 1960s and early 1970s radicalism at this point ('*why don't we do it in the street*') is looked at with some embarrassment today. It is true that many studies showed that the supposed 'communism in sex', as in the case of the US 'swingers', in reality often meant men's 'communism in women'. In other words it made the gender-as-woman framework even more overt than usual. Yet this fact does not answer all the questions raised by the movement trying to pull down the sexual fences and defences in the earlier period.<sup>13</sup>

In view of the above discussion of gender in social science, the *relative* developments of paradigms in critical sexuality research on the one hand and gender studies on the other is a topic of some interest. In line with the 'balancing act' where gender is seen as a mixture of social influence and natural sex, one might suppose that the critical new insight had mainly come from the gender studies area. Yet that is not the case.

Quite the contrary: the dawning realisation that sexuality is a historically variable category, to the extent that it *does not exist* in pre-modern society, that the very term is misleading since the intimacy framework, the meaning of the acts, and so on, were so different – all this has come *before* any similar realisation in the gender and women's studies tradition. If exceptions exist, like Badinter's (1981) early study of motherhood, I think it is true to say that they have mainly been pushed politely aside.

Certainly the gender researchers who want a return to the 'blood and flesh' of being men and women do not have this kind of research in mind.

Today we have the situation where, to put it pointedly, gender studies happily go on discussing gender *as if* resting partly on a natural basis of sex difference – whereas the research going into this area says something else. Critical sexuality studies are instead showing that this 'sex basis' is at least as historically variable as anything 'social' associated with gender. I shall return to this point shortly.

One main reason why critical sexuality studies have been less naturalising and more open to new paradigms relates to the social framework of these studies. They have united the perspectives of two rather than just one oppressed group in modern society, i.e. sexual minorities as well as women. This has created a fruitful tension between two different critical perspectives. Yet I do not believe that this political context contains the main answer. A simpler reason can be found. It explains a tendency in this research area long before anyone discussed uniting the perspectives of feminists, lesbians and gays, for example the research of Alfred Kinsey (cf. Wyatt, G et. al 1988).

This answer concerns sexuality *as practice* and the necessity to keep analyses of it grounded in this practice – in contradistinction to the flights of mind allowed in the gender area. In much gender theorising no such grounding is needed, since the gender relationship is 'of course' there anyway. It is no requirement that one *shows* that people do indeed act for gendered reasons, it can simply be assumed. Such assumptions cannot so easily be made regarding sexuality. It was the detailed empirical work of investigating *what people actually did* in physically intimate relationships that brought a researcher like Kinsey to conclude that the two sexual 'files' do not quite exist. Kinsey categorised a wide number of gradients instead. Later it brought researchers like Gagnon and Simon (1973; Simon & Gagnon 1984; Simon, W 1994) to describe sex as a field of silence and hidden social scripting.

This meeting with practices in studies of sexuality has had two main paradigmatic effects. Either it makes the researcher so bewildered by what she or he finds that the natural paradigm is emphasised all the more, as displayed in much sexology in the 1970s 'technicist' phase especially. Or it creates sociological views that often go further than those of gender studies. The latter tendency which has gradually become more manifest relates to the *specific* form-connected traits of sexuality as praxis, a praxis which is *overloaded* and therefore displays much tension and conflict, since *besides intimacy* it confers the larger status of gender. It is praxis of 'doing' gender that unlike other practices is very closely linked to the *staging* of gender itself. It creates, so to speak, the sensuous materiality of the stage.

The paradoxical result of the diverging development in gender and sexuality studies is that the 'social' notion of gender has remained more naturalistic and transhistorical than the 'natural' notion of sex. While it has increasingly become recognised that sexuality belongs to the modern agenda and should not be used of other intimacy arrangements, gender is used whatever the context. The *social anxiety* that became so overt in connection to sex in the 1950s and 1960s (and a main target of the revolt in the end of that period) has increasingly shifted to gender itself. Some of it also remains in the sexuality area – also among supposedly enlightened sociologists

(Gagnon, J et. al. 1982), and even within sexual minority groups. Gender has become a more overt issue within the sex field itself: what *kind* of 'sexual file' is perhaps not the most important question, as long as there *is* a file, an arrangement focused on sex difference. From a questionnaire study Paula Rust (1992) concludes that "historical circumstances have led to a situation in which bisexuality poses a personal and political threat to lesbians and lesbian politics".<sup>14</sup>

As I said, the main reason for the balancing act in gender studies consists in the assumption that there is a major natural component to the present gender arrangement, which can be described in terms of sex. Gender changes, the sex difference has been there all the time.

According to the evidence from anatomical textbooks and other sources presented by Thomas Laqueur (1990), this two-sexed view' of the human body is in fact a fairly recent phenomenon. It is part of a modern horizon replacing a much older one where sex differences were not stressed ("unisex tendency") and where body images were often modelled on the male body ("androcentric tendency"). Laqueur documents beyond reasonable doubt that anatomy and medical doctrine shifted from the unisex / androcentric model to a bipolar model at a quite *late* stage in the introduction of modernity. His work is an example of analyses that disclose some of the modern character of gender not in terms of gender theory as such, but through the more practical attention discussed above. He does this simply but also quite effectively by reproducing anatomical drawings that show how early modern scientists struggled with fitting emerging observations into the dominant unisex / androcentric model. To the modern eye the results are curious, notably with the vagina portrayed as an inverted penis.

The body itself, the supposed bastion of nature, thereby emerges as more open to historical perspectives than gender. This has some major implications for the whole field of gender studies that have so far mainly been ignored. If our notions of 'sex' are no more or less natural than, say, our notions of the mind, or as the ancients believed, the greater coldness or temperance of the male mind, then the whole framework of nature as *especially relevant* for discussing gender, compared to a discussion of social class or ethnicity / 'race', falls to the ground.

True, there is a natural differentiation of the sexes, yet we cannot, on the basis of the phenomenology of gender, argue that it has any greater relevancy for discussing power in that area than in any other. It has been used as a way of *legitimizing* this relationship, but that is quite another matter. For all we know, the *real* social implications of the natural difference connected to sex are more closely connected to *other* power relations than they are to the gender relationship. When did the legitimization of power spell the *truth* of the connection portrayed in this legitimization? Should we say that racism does indeed have a partial foundation in 'race', due to the fact that this is how racists see the world?

In the discussion above, a 'formed activity' model of gender was introduced, localising gender in terms of two main sets of *activities*, suggesting that gender is both an expression of, and a script for activity. This was done with all due respects to the gender system's existence 'sui generis' and its two-way rather than one-way association to the activity spheres. When this kind of social constructionist model is

attacked as 'deterministic', the alternative is not to go forwards, and suggest other solutions, but to go back to the 'flesh and blood' position (and perhaps some 'skin' also?). I do not imply that political reaction or 'wilful consideration' is the main foundation of this. Rather, it starts from the fact that *gender is there*, as is sex, as its 'inner' practice. As we just saw, when we go into that area, divergencies appear that do not conform to gender system differentiation; things become unruly. We may interpret sexuality as 'scripted' performance (like John Gagnon and others); but where do these scripts come from?

How is it that gender *has* this quality of being *there*, apart from, and before, what Judith Butler calls gender performances? In the current view, the answer must be sought by examining relations that, at first, are principally *unknown* and may have little directly to do with sex. I hypothesise that these societal relations are what is expressed in the fact that gender appears sensually and experientially established, that we 'take' each other for gendered. People are positioned in certain (as yet mainly unknown) ways, which *make their bodies seem, spontaneously, to be sexed bodies*. This larger matter is what creates this 'there-ness', or *Dasein* to use Heidegger's term, *facticity* in Sartre's.<sup>15</sup>

Further, this is not scenery only, a *seeming to be*, but actual being, people *are* genders, *are* men and women, sheltered in some senses, 'ledged'; and the commodity-related part of this positioning has the 'fallacy of being real', like any good paradox case of reification, since the existence of a *real abstraction* (real exchangeability) cannot be doubted. This is the staging, and when bodies are positioned in certain constellations, sexuality is what results, in the area of intimacy and procreation. This is hard to perceive, or even conceptualise, since we meet it as established fact. We always come into the play in Act Two, where bodies, now already 'there' as gender bodies, seem to run their own course, led by certain organs, etc. However, in relation to what was said earlier regarding transfers as information systems, markets trying as best they can, etc., we may also note the larger *intelligibility* of the code, which is in fact also there, it is specific *main pointer to body surface* and *one precise kind of body surface difference* as the coordinates of the message system itself.

This should make even the most biologically minded researcher pause. The code does not care about biology, it cares about body surface, sensual *appearance*, and that is not the same. *We* care about biology, meaning that we tend to overlook this unsettling superficial aspect or circumscribe it as if body surface and biology were synonymous.

Laqueur discusses the bipolar or gendered model of the human body as a new ideology replacing the older one, yet he does not put enough emphasis on that fact. What happened in anatomy was not just that ideology was replaced by science and by the purely natural conception of the human body. A new ideology was involved, where bodies are as dogmatically dual-sexed as they were once uni-sexed and male-like. This is more difficult to illustrate by way of anatomical drawings, precisely since it has shifted in its meta-institutional or organising principles; the photographic image neither detracts from nor adds to the ideology. Yet like women as '*the sex*' is still what crops up, when only 'dyadic gender' should be there. Power-related distortions appear here also, where realism is supposed to reign alone. Bodies are selected and positioned even in anatomical pictures, extending into a *differential social positioning*

found throughout modern society. This is more overt in popular culture, which brings in the wish-fulfilment aspect of gender.

If we look at how bodies are portrayed in areas where people can see what they like to see, or would buy to see, as in advertising, magazines and visual material, something very different from photographic realism appears. There is a constant overloading of sex difference and a massive emphasis on the Beauty Object, extending into a *general rule of selling* – if nothing else helps, try a beautiful woman on the cover. So if proportions are photographic when 'they cannot help be' (and even here, memory filtering and similar processes can be found), the main tendency is quite like the old one of inserting fit fragments of natural fact into a social framework and rearranging things a bit on the way.

In graphics of the human body, serials and cartoons, the code leads to women getting thinner waist and larger breasts than natural, men getting wider shoulders and greater height, and once more a larger intelligibility is involved, since the code itself indirectly tells us that *nature* is *not* where it is at. On the contrary, the presumably most relevant parts of nature, the male sex organ in particular, must *not* be shown. Popular culture here betrays a general pattern of society as a whole. This waist-thinning and breast-enlargening, shoulders-widening and so on go on in social science also, more hidden behind terms of established fact, the 'there-ness' that cannot be doubted.

So the neutral eye is not quite neutral. When we wonder what strange constellations of the soul that could make a Middle Ages artist wilfully depart from realism and draw bodies pear-shaped, downplaying sex difference to a point far below natural difference, the same departure is richly evidenced today also, in the opposite direction.

Elizabeth Badinter's (1981) pioneer attempt to deconstruct the naturalisation of motherhood has recently received a well-deserved renewed attention. Based on Badinter and on Jordanova's study of medicine, Isaksen (Isaksen, L W 1992:68pp.) writes:

"The legitimacy of these women [the '*precieuses*' in the 1660s who refused to marry and were allowed to study science], as independent, thinking women, did not last for long. A hundred years later, at the same time that the first demographic surveys showed population decline, the general opinion of the mother-child relation began to change. 'Moralists, administrators and doctors took aim and used the most subtle arguments in order to convince women to change their mind and 'once more breast-feed children', Badinter writes. They promised women who themselves breast-fed their children happiness, respect and worth. Rousseau was much used for emphasising the happiness of motherhood and its rightness, and those, who opposed the new ideology, were almost a target of warfare. (...)

During the 19th century, women's breasts were no longer there just for milk production, now the breasts were simply constitutive of morality. Not only did they give nourishment, they were also attractive and they created social ties between women and men. For women, they were the origin of their 'simple, natural morality'. This morality was, on the other hand, associated with ignorance and inferiority of

intellect. It was only in the 20th. century that the gynaecologists became interested in women's inner organs, like e.g. the womb."<sup>16</sup>

Earlier I referred Heath's question: How come it is there, instead of something else? How come *gender* is there, instead of something else?

## Transubstantiation and the strange case of 'gender confirmation'

We may approach this issue in a more specific case. I shall focus on an everyday matter, namely the fact that a woman is able to 'confirm' or 'enhance' the gender of a man, and a man that of a woman. This fact, brought out in practices like flirting, belongs to the taken-for-granted trivialities that are more puzzling than they first seem to be.

First I shall retrace some steps. Through partner selection and family formation, people make gender into a sociological proposition, recreating institutions and gender itself as an institutional pattern. Further, gender is partly positioned vis-à-vis itself, partly vis-à-vis a specific kind of neutrality. The dyadic 'he is, she is' rule here turns asymmetrical: 'he has, she is'. While gender has exchange-like properties in some arenas, notably partner selection, we also saw that this outright (but still non-monetary) gender market is in many ways limited, even if it creates a point of perspective of importance for the rest.

In order to venture further, the market as 'upside-down reality' principle was heavily used, which is not untrue, but also a kind of backwards manoeuvre. Why drag the market into it in the first place, then only to turn it around, instead of going directly to a view where we start from gender *as* counterpoised to the commodity form?

This was done for two related reasons. Firstly, it meant following the process itself. Secondly, this counterpositioning is not an external matter. It is not to be understood for example in terms of a separate mode of production. At each step of the way, in the gender market, in the family formation process, and in the work / family relationship, what appears is a *polarisation*, i.e. two linked contrary positions within one system, none of them meaningful or viable on its own. This is further developed later, in terms of the 'differentiation principle' (chapter 9), where I argue that commodity production cannot go on without a certain kind of 'counterproduction'. This split in the background fabric of modern society is strongly associated with gender.

These arguments are anticipated in the present section. Examining the '*there-ness*' of gender is comparable to starting from the *capital* commodity rather than the commodity as such. I take the gender / neutral differentiation as well as inside-gender differentiation as established facts. In social forms analysis terms, it means a movement from the second towards the third level of analysis. We may then find that second-level commodity relations have *less* important links to third-level capital commodity relations than some forms of gift relations. As I said (chapter 7), transfers often run contrary to what might be expected from regarding them on their own, since the higher-level context often overrules the lower-level one.

What is at hand, then, in 'gender confirmation', has nothing to do with the reciprocity between A and B, be it gift-like, commodity-like or whatever, as long as A and B are there, *as* man and woman. It is the *there-ness* or *facticity* of gender which is the focus of inquiry, and not how this is influenced by the immediate reciprocity context. Earlier I asked what this immediate context can tell us of gender, why women's activities appear *as* men's larger being while patriarchal power becomes overt in the beauty object position of women, etc. Now the questions are different. What specific traits of society are involved in gender's *being there in the first place*; are these specific traits related to the capitalist era commodity form or not.

In principle we might therefore end up with a model where everyone's *giving* their gender, gender as gift, is the expression of *gender as capital*, while their exchange-like manoeuvres only disturb the smooth working of the system. Gender as commodity in the *direct* sense is perhaps 'dysfunctional' and a sign that the patient does have problems. This may be going too far, yet it certainly clarifies the *principal difference* between the two frameworks.

So if the gender system is the outcome a variety of transfer settings, with rules only partially linked to an exchange paradigm, the question remains whether we should regard this broader commodity form association as the central one, or rather put main emphasis on other connections, and see the existence of gender as a gift relationship as indicative of its association to a different social form, or in traditional Marxist parlance, to a different mode of production. In other words, if not just women, but gender as such, are in some important ways posited as 'beyond' the main relationships of the capitalist age, what is the character of this position?

Marx's (1974:216) concept of '*transubstantiation*' is useful here. Discussing the commodity identity relationship, Marx argues that the 'substance' (not 'essence' but 'sensuous presence', *stofflichen Seite*, op.cit.218) of the one commodity in this relationship no longer resided in its specificity, its concreteness, but in something else, the material substance of the commodity that it was exchanged with. It is not only the case that the substance of the equivalent commodity, i.e. the commodity that expresses the value of some other (relative) commodity, now gives sensuous shape to the social character of that relative commodity. Neither is it only the case that the use value or materiality of the relative commodity becomes nil, zero, or useless in itself for the owner of this commodity. Rather, as an owner of the relative commodity *a*, my relationship to the use value of *a* becomes *mediated* through the sensuality or use value of the equivalent commodity *b*. So my way of seeing *a*, as well as my general view of the whole relation, become 'coloured' by *b*, sensuously shaped or filtered by it. This is the primary meaning of transubstantiation: my use value (if my self, in some sense, is my commodity) is *substantiated* not directly, but cross-wise, through the substantiality or materiality of the other.

This may seem a rather awkward way of expressing what has been said earlier about the peculiar cross-wise validation of gender, for example in the case where a woman's sensuous presence confirms a man's masculinity. Yet I believe some detailed 'slow motion' analysis should be applied here, precisely turning to a 'fast motion', reflex-like phenomenon like flirting.

Two different processes are involved when I can say of a man as well as a woman that they 'confirm' my masculinity. The dividing line between these two is full of sociological markers, saying that while confirmation is OK either way, some forms of it are definitively not to be applied in the man-man relationship. In the background there are also some forms not appropriate in the man-woman relation.

The man-woman type of confirmation clearly is culturally and institutionally central in our society, to the extent that man-man confirmations also revolve around it. Confirmations of masculinity between men usually involve cross-sex confirmation on the symbolical level. They can be seen as masculine in a more direct sense also, by being strong, brave, etc., but the centre of all this is their relation to women, with the phallus as main symbol. Their relation to women is the basic 'teller' or measurement. In my view, this is the highly *local phenomenon* on the wider historical horizon that postmodernists and feminists have universalised under the heading '*phallogocentrism*' (cf. transfer fetishism). It is a variable phenomenon also in our own society. The greater the emphasis on dyadic gender, the greater the centrality of cross-sex affirmation. When the asymmetry becomes more overt, men increasingly turn directly to each other for gender confirmation.

Another noteworthy trait appears. The centrality of cross-sex confirmation does not primarily depend on whether both women and men are present or not. Instead it depends on whether gender is a main part of the framework of interaction or not. When interaction becomes more gendered, cross-sex validation is emphasised; when it becomes less gendered, its importance declines. In wage work, for example, same-sex confirmation is often of main importance. When gender itself becomes institutionally effective, same-sex confirmation is both pushed back and itself rephrased around the man-woman central piece of code.

More specific exceptions can also be found. At the edge of adults' gender horizon, among children before puberty, as well as in various exceptional circumstances like prisons, the emphasis shifts towards same-sex validation, transubstantiation reverting to substantiation.

In some ways, this substantiation is a simpler and more direct process: I have something, I give it to you, now it is your something. It stays the same something: masculinity. Yet that is what it can *not* do, if I am a man giving it to you, a woman, and it ends up as your femininity. So this 'gender confirmation' matter is not so trivial after all.

The direct substantiation pattern, rather than transubstantiation, seems to be typical of non-commodity societies like those studied by anthropologists. It also appears as the most central one until fairly recently in our own history. Linked to it is an emphasis on same-sex rather than cross-sex confirmation. There is also an 'overflow of meaning' from the former to the latter, instead of the contrary process which is typical today.

Here as elsewhere the sociological argument must be disentangled from a formal one. In a formal sense, cross-sex and same-sex validation can probably be found anywhere, and the issue concerns their character and their relative importance. Further, the argument must be rescued from a certain dialectical metaphysic saying that anyone is



cross-wise identified anyway, since any relation is 'dialectical'. There is a lot to be said for making a general case out of the fact that the I can never be I without You, You never You without I, etc., or as Marx mentioned in this regard, that the king is only king since his subordinates are subordinates. In sum, everyone affects each other.

Beyond that rather non-informational level, however, *much more* is involved regarding gender transubstantiation. Long-nosed people do not in reality look around dialectically for the short-noses to confirm them, yet when we come to the organ opposition this is the *social fact*. Nor is it the case that relations of power are mainly or usually cross-wise established in this sense; instead, workers or other groups mainly confirm their identity among themselves, even if power creates contradiction and therefore enhanced contradistinction ('us' as defined by 'them', etc.). In the labour market, transubstantiation is one important aspect, the worker's traits becoming like money, and money in turn like work, working for themselves in the bank and so on. Yet once more gender definitively gives an edge to this.

Various problems with a gender as gift view have been discussed earlier – women's conception of 'lacking gifts' from the man in marriages, creating one-sidedness in a relation that requires a minimum of mutual involvement in order to function; gifts as ideology, commodity wish-images, and similar. However, these objections relate to the second-level reciprocity context, as a critique of the tendency to ignore commodity associations, and are principally less relevant on the present level. Here, to repeat a point by turning it around, we might find everyone busy *exchanging* their gender and yet find reasons to see gender mainly as a *gift relation* in society at large.

We may also argue that gifts as well as commodities can 'transubstantiate', which makes the present argument more problematical. I keep to a general conception of gifts that says they do not mainly do so. Instead, the main aspect of the gift, in the case of a person A giving a gift *a* to person B, is that *B becomes A-like*. This is not the reflective sense of likeness of the commodity relationship. B instead becomes *associated* with A, included in the *sphere* of A, *part of* A, *sharing* in the various degrees of pollution / sacral cleanness of A and what not, all enhancing *substantiation* in the sense outlined. The gift of *a* does not enhance B's feeling of having / being *b*, which is what is to be explained here.

As far as gender confirmations are gifts, then, they do not quite behave as gifts should behave. This is not what brings about the facticity of gender. They may act properly as gifts in the concrete context, yet their common behaviour betrays something else. The gender confirmation is a 'transubstantial' gift, rather than a 'substantial' one, and this transubstantial behaviour is one associated with *commodities*, not gifts.

If women 'give' their femininity, their sex, men do not become more feminine by receiving these gifts, and women do not become more masculine by receiving men's gifts. On the contrary, by receiving, each instead seems to gain more not of what they get, but of what they had before.

Why is it that I, a man, become more masculine by receiving the gift of femininity? Why does not the feminine spirit descend on me, the *hau* described by Mauss, imbricating me with its quality, making me, as receiver, part of this quality? As argued, the basic anthropological view says that if B receives a gift from A, B

becomes A-associated. The same goes for redistributive arrangements, I believe: by receiving some portion or ration from some redistributive unit C, A and B both become C-associated.

So *if* modern gender is indeed mainly a non-commodity reciprocity relationship, we should expect results that are quite contrary to the ones we can observe. We should expect, in Mauss' words, sympathetic magic, 'girl-bugs' (jentelus) as boys say, and not oppositional magic. The analog connection should be more central than the cross-over one.

In our own history, we do not have to go far back to observe some change of scenery at this point, with more emphasis on substantiation rules and on male-male confirmation especially than we are used to today. In pre-modern patriarchal forms and in the first 'paternatic' modern period, men were not commonly affirmed and socially certified as men by *women*, but by *other men*. Culturally and socially this aspect was much more overt and central than today. The very designation of gender-as-woman points to that fact, as does the connected emergence of modern gender discourse *as* woman-question discourse.

How can a masculine signal end up as a feminine trait? As far as I can see, only for one reason, that the two, while different, are also alike one another. Masculine trait A can turn to feminine trait B and vice versa if both belong to a wider logical class C. We must assume that a *middle zone* exists. Therefore I believe that the confirmation passes through a middle zone C. From left to right:

A masculine --> C attractive / sexual? --> B feminine.

If this is correct, there is a larger abstraction, uniting masculine and feminine, here called the 'sexual / attractive'. What is the character of this zone?

The other, in my case a woman, performs a communicative act, or one that can be taken as a signal. The signal exists as the woman's feminine signal, and is *not* directly appreciated by me, a man, as such. If that was the case, my receiving it would in principle enhance my femininity. The signal, *as* gender signal, is instead put in a middle position, in which signals, still in their function as gender signals, *are not gendered in the dyadic sense*. It is no longer a woman-signal, a feminine signal. Instead, it is gendered in the *generic* sense, 'gender as such', discussed earlier (chapter 3 and 4). In other words, it is a signal that now basically says 'we two are both gendered, we belong to the category of gendered beings'.

Thereby the signal exists as a pointer only to gender as general property, not to any specific position within it. Two traits seem to characterise this paradoxical middle zone. The first is attractiveness. If the signal points to gender as such, it also points to attractiveness as such. It points to the *whole* of the gender system, or in terms of its soft currency, the beauty object, it signifies what is *common* to this function of 'money' and the corresponding 'prices' of commodities (cf. the earlier quote (Fridtjof) from the gender market study: "I believe it is success. That is what you sell.") Attractiveness itself has this larger term above it: 'success', or the word attractive may itself contain that meaning, "A is an attractive person", meaning that A is evaluated both in gender and labour market terms.

The attractiveness meaning of gender as such therefore points both to the price standard within the gender system and to the larger translation between this valuation sphere and the value sphere outside it. The latter is primarily monetary value with its main source in the sphere of production. In other words, gender attractiveness now shows the *equivalence* in qualitative terms between the two spheres. So at the heart of the 'micro' matter of gender confirmation lies a 'macro' relation that could not have existed for example if the two had instead been separated modes of production.

Further, this qualitative equivalence may imply the existence of the same *value* or larger commodity-economic framework in each sphere, regulating the connections between them. This logic is well known from Marx: since there is exchange equality, there must be labour involved. But is that a necessary consequence? May it not the case, instead, that the common ground equivalency is established for some other reason, since after all much else (besides labour capacity) can be found that unites people?<sup>17</sup>

Whatever the case, a middle zone is created, a feminine or masculine confirmation or signal seems to pass through a pure gender zone, which does show some affinity with 'value' since pure attraction is also involved here. This is the receptory of your signal, and from this receptory, this 'cache', I am able to pick it up. Only in this neutralised, absolute form can I appropriate it, and thereby enhance my masculinity. A feminine signal, directly appropriated, would instead endanger my masculinity. Although we cannot directly perceive it, this intermediate zone is therefore no figment of the imagination; we are forced to assume its existence. We should note, also, that the 'inner' neutrality here is not the same as the 'outer' neutrality (in gender system terms) of neutralised masculinity; its existence is basically sexual rather than monetary.

We may trace the existence of this middle zone also in various daily life expressions of gender confirmation. If you confirm my existence as a man, there is a moment where I can recognise, indeed where I am forced to acknowledge, that you do it as *you*, and not as a member of the category 'women'. There is a moment in which I will have to disentangle the subject from the category for the confirmation to 'work', to be effective, to be something that can subsequently pass on to me. And in this moment, also, I am set free from being a man, a masculine agent; I appreciate your confirmation as a person, and my turning it into masculinity is a next step. If this is true, there lies a 'this is good for *me*' reaction before or below the 'this is good for me *as a man*' reaction. The generic and the individual meanings of gender thereby emerge on an axis. If attractiveness is the abstract concept of gender as such, sexuality is its concreteness, its practice. If I say 'attractiveness' equals 'success', it is only because I have preloaded this success with some sexual meaning.

The practice of sexuality therefore takes on a special significance. It does not *constitute* the middle zone, rather, it is the acts that lodge it in bodily material, nature, or the acts that ground it in natural practice. I am not quite sure how this should be grasped. What emerges, anyway, is the *sameness* of sexuality, which again is surprising, and contrary to much conventional thinking. Rather than being the acts that enhance the gender difference, sexuality in this analysis becomes the acts that certify their sameness.

Could it be that we are so blinded by gender that we do not see that this is a trait which is in fact there, as a main theme of modern sexuality? The *identity* of everyone as sexual beings, beneath the level of feminine and masculine?

Sexual practice thereby leads out of the terrain of gender practice, starting so to speak in the eye of the storm, a precarious position. Sexual problems are commonly sameness problems: overdoing gender, not being able to appreciate the other as similar to oneself, since sexuality becomes vaguely threatening if opposition is not maintained. That trait, I believe, points to the weak role of substantiation in the overall arrangement. Much is done in order to make sex and gender correlate, to make them congruent, and yet such attempts principally never quite succeed. In everyday terms the most usual misfit is probably the one between the *person* next to you and the *gender attractiveness* which is always somewhere else, not quite *there*. It cannot be quite there since its there-ness is a not-being-there.

In positive circumstances, the middle ground helps me appreciate the other as a full person, not just a gendered person, enhancing love and friendship. Or it may be 'just sex', not 'he/she' but 'the animal within', as an interpretation of the fact that people's sexual activity is remarkably similar beyond the gender scripts that circumscribe this curiously un-gendered place within. The energy that goes into either lifting sex upwards ('the Big O'), or putting it down as dirty or sinful, may be taken as an indication of the precariousness of this terrain of sameness. Why sameness? Here, instead *difference* should at last be left to follow its own natural course!

Much of this runs contrary to common logic. Conventional thought at least within the gender studies field tells me, rather, that sex is the hot-zone of the gender system. I myself have believed that, considering sexual harassment, pornography, prostitution: *sexuality* is where gender, and also patriarchy, becomes *especially* marked. Yet here I am saying that this is not true, or at least not all; there is also an inner zone where it becomes unmarked, where gender neutrality reigns, and without this 'eye of the storm', the rest would not happen either. The gender system itself rests on this inner border zone of that which is neither feminine nor masculine, but passes between.

If the commodity character of gender rather than its gift character is involved in the constitution of this zone, it does not follow that all that subsequently happens relates to commodities. On the contrary, it may be argued that this sameness, including sexuality as a practice that continuously subverts gender scripts, is a main ground for love and friendship. Yet this zone remains *part* of a larger relation, and it does not make the polarisation disappear. Even as we move beyond 'the gates of gender', trying to reach the other as full person, this larger relation still marks our way. In other words, loving is nevertheless *contingent* on that person's sexual organs, as is brought out especially in situations of *doubt*.

The film *Tootsie* has an episode highlighting this. In the film, Dustin Hoffman plays a man dressed up as a woman; a man falls in love with her, and they almost have sex. After having discovered the 'true' sexual organ situation, the man, shocked, breaks out: '*I would have killed you if I had known you were a man!*' What should be a fully personal love and attraction is nevertheless something that may turn not only to indifference, but to hate and repulsion on fully impersonal grounds.

Inside the gate, we do not need to 'substantiate' each other; we *are*. Yet what *we* are as persons now includes the objectivity of gender, if only as subdued common property. In each gender confirmation, each small episode of flirting, this scenario is played out on a symbolical level, a fantasy tour inside the gate, and as we return to our private spheres, we have indeed 'transubstantiated' each others' existence as gendered persons; each person's self-relationship now exists mediated, backtracked so to speak, from the imaginary meeting with the other's sensual being.<sup>18</sup>

## Sexuality and repulsion

To the above argument that gender is built on a process of transubstantiation connected to the modern commodity form it may be objected that exploratory arguments or logical categorisation prove little, one way or the other, regarding gender as gift- or commodity-related framework. Cross-wise identification and learning are not to be explained in terms of a 'middle zone', linked to value; it simply rests on a relative (dyadic) equality between the partners, two subjects meeting each other in a heterosexual framework.

Yet the *homophobic* element and existential anxiety that appear among heterosexual men especially if the sex organ context is 'wrong', is not so easily explained on that basis. Also, since homophobia varies with historical and social context, a sociobiological interpretation seems of limited relevance.

In general, far less work has been done analysing sexuality or gender itself as a system of *repulsion* than as a system of attraction. A main exception to this rule consists of psychodynamic theories of childhood identity formation that put emphasis on the conflict between the child, the boy especially, and the same-sex parent. It seems to be silently assumed, however, that within the sexual system itself, as practised by adults, attraction is the main matter, not repulsion. This assumption illustrates the problems with a common version of a 'praxis' framework, i.e. one that assumes practices can be theorised straightaway on an immediate level. It may be the case, instead, that most of the immediately present praxis in this area is governed by a not so immediately seen non-praxis, i.e. by *rules of repulsion*, of which the rules of attraction are only the upper, superficial layer, the tip of the iceberg.

Homophobia brings this matter into the foreground, since there is no doubt that repulsion is involved here, attached to anxiety. Together, these elements go further than the pollution aspect that might be hypothesised in a gift context. Rather, the concept of '*social death*' (Patterson, O 1982) is relevant here. As a heterosexual man, I am not just 'dishonoured', 'shamed', or 'polluted' by same-sex intimacy. Instead the 'I' itself is endangered. There is a threatened fall down from the gender ledge into some dark abyss which is not just feminine but utterly disintegrating or chaotic.

Why does this perceived danger appear, and why does it loom in men's minds more than in women's? Power theory and psychodynamic theory may both be relevant here. In the first framework, men have more to lose by being posited symbolically as women, which same-sex intimacy might easily do. If men's identities are constituted at least partially on the basis of being empowered vis-à-vis women, their identity and not just their power is endangered. In the psychodynamic framework, the argument is

similar; being positioned as a woman means a perceived loss of identity or self-control.

Both of these explanations, however, raise the question of why same-sex intimacy would 'position' men as women. Once more the atypical character of modern gender comes to the fore: patriarchal societies where same-sex activity between men has been allowed or encouraged, notably those of antiquity, were well able to differentiate at this point. As John Boswell (1980) documents in the case of Rome, it was the 'passive' sexual position that was seen as degrading for a man, not the active one, and moreover, this degradation was age-dependent, it involved the older man, not his younger lover. The idea that same-sex intimacy 'instantly' would turn the heterosexual man into a social woman therefore itself needs to be explained. I have attempted this in another context (Holter 1989:172, my trans.). After a discussion of how sexuality appears as what men want and women have, a 'treasure' owned by women, I write:

"This seriousness [of men's homophobia] stems from the fact that it *appears*, for heterosexual men, as if the homosexual breaks the sexual law in a way which eradicates the very ground of the male dominance position in society, turning it into its opposite. (...) [The heterosexual man] interprets the gay man from the point of view of his own heterosexuality, where desire connects to the opposite-sex object. But the object for the gay man is his own sex; it may be the [heterosexual] man himself. The latter sees himself as prisoner in the sexual treasure chamber instead of being its guardian and ruler. This is experienced as threatening."

Yet this wider framework of ownership and owned is insufficient. We may go further, and argue that the positioning of the relative [male] commodity *as* equivalent, or the *reversal* of the relative position into that of the equivalent, 'ruins' whatever is in this position, or is perceived in that manner, more so than in the opposite case, where the equivalent is positioned as relative commodity. This argument goes beyond the dyadic gender level where all kinds of reversals can occur; it is the gender-as-woman level which is involved. There is perceived threat, evoked by the potential positioning of that which is to be constituted as masculine in a place otherwise occupied exclusively by that which is to be constituted as feminine. In other words, the property associated with men is now, by same-sex intimacy, positioned in *the same position* otherwise occupied not just by women, but exclusively by gender-as-woman. This not only denies masculinity on the dyadic level; it also tendentially denies *existence* on the deeper level. Masculinity is indeed part-defined as equivalent on the dyadic level. Here, however, it does not exist as anything personal, it does not exist as a subject, a self.

In this interpretation, heterosexuals' antipathy towards homosexuals, as the weaker case, and heterosexual men's homophobia, as the stronger case, both involve a perceived dissolution of the gender ledge, and in the stronger case it more specifically involves a perceived impossible position, like men being in their own shadow. It is disintegrating and impossible not for sexual reasons but for existential reasons, since it turns men from a specific patriarchal ownership position into the contrary position of that which is owned by it.

## Gender as power

I shall turn to a more familiar terrain. The rest of this chapter concerns gender and power, the limits of the gender framework, and theories of gender as class.

Probably, the view of gender *as* a power arrangement has been more common in gender studies than any other. In the weaker sense that gender relations often *include* power asymmetry, this view has been confirmed by a large number of studies over the last decades, covering violence against women, sexual aggression, wage and work life discrimination, male-centred language and communication and much else. Many of these studies have not only opened for new ways of understanding, but also for legitimating new topics of research and debate. In their wake, strategies for change and plans for solving problems have emerged.

Throughout this vast effort, the gender / power paradigm has been useful also *because* it has been diffuse, so that gender in practice has meant not just 'what women and men do *as* women and men', but whatever they do that is widely relevant for discrimination and inequality. Studies of rape, for example, show the power element in the men's behaviour, how it structures the rape situation, its effect on the victim, and also – though this is still more hidden in the background – what factors tend to create or contribute to this power element.

We may even say the gender as power paradigm has been effective precisely by *not* taking its own 'social' clause too seriously, since this has allowed a concentration, through gender, on wider questions of dominance. In other words, most studies do not ask whether men rape or oppress women *as men* or *as* otherwise situated, i.e. if it is due to their position *as masculine* or to something else. Instead the relevance of that framework has been taken more or less for granted, as if automatically following from and axiomatically inherent in a relationship where men oppress women. And so, whatever is to be said of the reasoning behind this assumption, in a certain sense it has allowed researchers to concentrate on the main subject, namely the oppression, violence and domination itself. This works some part of the way. Yet the initial problems reappear at one main point: namely the inability of the gender / power framework to explain *why* these dominance phenomena exist.

Focusing on the *problems* of the 'gender = power' approach is therefore not to be dismissed as an attempt to put sticks in the great wheel of feminist progress. The problems are not simply conceptual or theoretical. The basic fact is that the current gender-as-power paradigm is (a) not really able to say why the power is there, or what it consists of, and (b) not able to solve the practical problems even if it may help delimit them.

Earlier, I have described a situation that exists even in an relatively egalitarian country like Norway, where main structural or 'heavy' mechanisms of inequality remain, *plus* new countertendencies like the sex / violence syndrome. So a case can certainly be made for asking 'what is wrong' with the conventional gender / power approach.

There are two main paths of interpretation possible at this point. One path leads to a picture of denial and repression. Many men, and women also, deny the reality which is in fact there, men partly because it is in their interest as power holders, partly due to psychological mechanisms; women because the reality may be too hard to face, or because formulating it would weaken their position even more. The avoidance matter

has been studied especially as regards women's side of the affair, in a formulation that has become well known in the Scandinavian context: "*the essence of femininity is to make inequality appear egalitarian*" (Haavind in Haukaa et. al. 1982:151, my trans.). In this way, the gender framework of the researcher gets the extra edge of concerning truths that people just do not want to face up to. Any attempt to problematise this approach may easily be classified in that direction too.

The other path may be outlined by looking more closely at the arguments of Hanne Haavind's *Power and Love in Marriage* paper where this definition of femininity appears. This is done in the rest of this section.

Haavind discusses various definitions of gender, and finds a *relational* concept superior to a normative role concept and a concept of gender as two sets of traits (op. cit. 150pp.). "Instead of searching for feminine and masculine *traits*, one must consider femininity and masculinity as an evaluation of how a person *relates to* another." The paper, which has become a classic in the Scandinavian context, discusses interaction between spouses in this perspective. Not much emphasis is put on distinguishing between how people relate as gendered persons, and how they relate in other capacities – or, in Haavind's relational terms, *other* relations or aspects of relations between the two spouses.

Interpreted as an inquiry into the ways in which marital interaction is often gendered interaction and the ways in which power comes into this, the paper combines excellent observations and radical and daring formulations that appear as fresh today, fifteen years later, as they did at the time. Yet another interpretation is also possible, and the virtues of this paper makes it a fit starting-place.

Although it is never clearly stated that spouses relate *only* as gendered persons, I think it is fair to say that this is the impression one gets; in effect, the notion of 'person' is swallowed up by that of gender. Class issues, for example, are discussed as subcategories or further qualifications of the greater gender framework. Due to various class circumstances, "the oppression [of women] gets a class character" (op.cit. 157). Marriage emerges as a relationship of exploitation, one that all women are on some level silent about (op.cit. 141), often due to a "floating loyalty" that even the young women come to feel for their men and their marriages, even if they only selected the man because he seemed "good and kind". "Almost no-one mentioned his appearance, and no-one mentioned status", Haavind writes (op.cit. 155). We are given a picture of innocence.

Yet if women are the victims of the arrangement, it also appears as a result of their own self-denial. "I define gender love as an emotional state (or the hopes for achieving such a state) that makes the male dominance and the female subordination appear positive and attractive for both partners" (op.cit. 148). The spouses are faced with the project of "not only making their differences appear fair and egalitarian, but also as consequences of the love they feel for each other." (ibid.).

The love and gender project thereby emerges *as* a domination and legitimation project, or the two are so closely intertwined that the social microscope would have to be strong indeed to enable us to tell them apart. This is not what Haavind may have intended, yet it is a plausible interpretation of her main message.



This is also, I think, a line of thought that many people react against, and associate with the negative aspects of feminism and gender equality politics. As discussed earlier, the two Norwegian terms that appear in this context are significant, 'likeverd' (equal worth, equity) on the one hand and 'likestilling' (equal position, equality) on the other. Many people agree with the first, while being negative to the second, mainly due to the two sets of associations connected to them. What people often associate with the first is a message that says 'leave gender difference alone', while the other is perceived as 'equalise the genders, make everyone equal'. Whether this appreciation is correct or not is not my point here; this is how the two positions usually appear in informal gender politics.

The *seductive* aspect of the gender as '*power plus denial*' model lies in its ability to delegitimise the first notion as a matter of principle, and, further, in its ability to explain just about anything, i.e. to be a little too good to be true. If we agree to it, we confirm it, and if we do not, there are good reasons to believe we confirm it all the more.

In this respect, Haavind's model has some of the dangers of the self-fulfilling prophecy and the double bind. All the more reason, therefore, to formulate the other position as clearly as possible, turning to the other path of interpretation.

We may start by noting the indubitable fact that gender and power are not quite the same, that one cannot be reduced to the other. Similarly, we reintroduce the notion that persons are more than their genders, and interact in other ways also, in marriage and elsewhere.

Each time gender researchers simply *assume* the existence of a specific social relation, i.e. the gender relation, from the fact that the people they study are women and men interacting with each other, they *deny* the social character of gender. The fact that they do not do so openly, in clearly stated terms, scarcely improves matters. At that level, it does not make on iota of difference whether one *declares* gender to be social, as long as it is *in practice* taken for granted that whenever women and men are physically present or their interrelationship is implied, gender comes along for the ride.

The alternative approach says: it is not true that gender and power are one and the same. People may make sex socially relevant without moving into a position of powerful and powerless. On the other hand they may also use power without making sex relevant, also in a family setting. These things are distinct and mixing them up leads to a deterministic analysis with a bottom line of men's inner oppressive nature.

The main objection to such an alternative path thereby also becomes obvious. According to the 'power plus denial' view this is simply one more version of the denial, or it contains so much of it that agreeing to it would amount to a large step backwards.

I do not think such an objection would be right. Why should it represent a denial, *except* by taking refuge in the very thesis which is disputed, namely that power *is* gender, gender *is* power? If we distinguish between the two, we do not close the door on power analysis or gender analysis, nor on studying their interconnection. On the contrary, the alternative argument says patriarchal power exists *other places also*, not

just in 'society at large', but 'here', at home, in the intimate relationship; it exists *also in other relations or aspects of relations between men and women*. It is the assumed identity, or the close and narrow focusing on the link between gender and power, which is rejected.

The alternative concerns the need for nuance and the need for an understanding not only of gender itself but even more of the personal relationship in which it is one element – as a broad, complex and multidimensional relationship. Relations between women and men, also those institutionalised mainly in terms of gender, contain *many* statuses, positions, roles or identity aspects, *many* forms of signification, and forms of power. People do not just 'act', as some 'pure praxis' analyses would have it, they act *as*, in a multitude of capacities, within specific social forms. We may *assume* that the main burden of oppression of women is a result of the way people act *as* gendered persons, yet this remains to be proved, for what studies indicate is only that this burden is in fact often transmitted *also* in that context, i.e. in the gendered signification form, which is not the same. It may be the case that papers like Haavind's make the symptom (in fact: one part of the symptom, the overtly gendered part) into the cause. This we do not know, and the reason why it is not known is related, precisely, to the predominance of the power / gender framework criticised. We have very few studies that go into other possibilities at all.

It *may* be the case, for example, that men's violence against women is better explained in *other* frameworks than that of gender. It may be the case that social class or 'race' or age-related aspects are more relevant. On the whole, far from *doing away* with power, it may be the case that looking into all these other statuses and meaning frameworks may yield a far wider and better understanding of it. The same can be said regarding men. We do not have to stretch and overload the gender framework; we may recognise that men also act in other capacities, and we may leave the possibility open that relatively non-gendered aspects of men's lives are in fact of major importance for understanding men's contributions to oppression of women.

## The gender fixation

The problems of the gender framework discussed above do not exist in isolation. They do not belong only to the comparatively small area of gender-related research. Before looking more closely on the ways in which gender *is* indeed power and may be described also in terms of 'class', I shall describe the wider cultural pattern which is their context. This also serves to get my critique into perspective. If the 'gender fixation' to be described can be found even in feminist theory and gender research, its main context is society at large. It is primarily a product of current patriarchal reorganisation, yet it is repeated and in some ways also strengthened when gender studies rely on a fetishised conception of gender.

Through the preceding discussion I have repeatedly stressed that gender is not a closed system but part of a wider opposition between the gendered and the neutral. This goes for the gender fixation also, which is in fact one side of a double deal. Although the neutral side is mostly addressed in part two, some comments are pertinent here.

This 'neutral' framework is still a main background of the gendered figure. Feminist theory and gender research mainly arose as a challenge to the traditional position presenting the individual and society in a male perspective disguised in neutral terms. This is still the case in many areas of social science including Marxist traditions where feminism has often only had a surface impact. In a recent example, John Torrance (1995:183) discusses the social subject in capitalism in these words: "The owner of commodities or money as he (or strictly 'it', for this is a genderless person, though conventionally [sic] masculinised due to the patriarchy current in capitalist societies) appears in the market". No more is said of this patriarchy. We might as well argue that class is simply a convention; one is not exactly convinced of the genderless character of the 'it' he describes.

Other neutralisms are more overtly 'degenderising', or gender is silently left out by the old manoeuvre of making it into a home-only, private life-only question, below the horizon of sociological macro theory. I agree with most of the feminist critique of these strategies. Not only is the 'life world' no secluded, virginal arena, it even systematises right back. As Gerd Lindgren (1989:80) argues, "private gender contracts infiltrate public power".

Some of the male response to the feminist critique has also been fairly indicative, as in the case of Trond Berg Eriksen (1995:5) who not only argues for a "radical culturalist" view of gender but also goes on to use heavy artillery against Kristeva and other feminists – they represent "a singularly foolish gnostic confusion of sex and gender", even a "dominant anti-reason of our time" based on "naturalistic interpretation", a "stupid reductionism: the belief that gender is the most important of all factors" (op.cit.2,3).

Berg Eriksen's heavy accusations and the idea that such genderising views are especially *stupid* fall on his own two feet. This, however, is not all there is to it; some of the critique against feminists for over-emphasising gender is in fact well placed. This is also increasingly recognised by some feminists, like Christina Wetterberg (1992:39) who quotes Margaretha Lindholm: "Feminist research perhaps can, or even should, leave 'woman' (..) as its point of departure and road sign (..) but it cannot leave women."

On this background, I focus on the *gender fixation* as a subject in its own right, a tendency that can be examined and criticised without slipping back into a defence of masculine pseudo-neutrality.

By the term 'gender fixation' I mean a contemporary tendency towards interpreting people *as* gendered beings, an over-emphasis on gender and gender difference to the exclusion of all other kinds of being and difference. This is not necessarily openly motivated by 'biology as destiny' views, yet in fact it means treating people in the same manner, *as if* their sex simply spelled their gender. Gender-fixated practice is behaviour that corresponds to this line of interpretation. I believe the gender fixation is one main way in which women's liberation efforts are assimilated and coopted into contemporary society as part of a more abstract and bodily reified form of patriarchal organisation. Through it, women have gained some more ground in a system which is still patriarchal, through a path of diverting patriarchy critique into gender critique – not critique *of* gender, but *within* the presupposed frame of gender.

The gender fixation is primarily an informal pattern of modern society and culture, and therefore not so easily identified in formal or institutional terms. It may be approached, however, on the level of 'common themes' and 'rules of interpretation and interaction'. Some main rules are outlined below.

1. *Gender as familiarisation point.* This rule says: *the more different, the more alike.* Not in all and any respect, but in this specific respect: gender. Gender becomes the specific 'social navel' that relates modernity to the rest of the social universe.

The rule appears in the fact that when modern culture portrays distant societies, past epochs or foreign peoples, it is often with the notion that there is at least *one* safe similarity across the great divide of culture, time and space – gender. Gender now becomes a preamble to personal relationships, families, love, children, concepts of the present and the future, of what society and the individual are – 'as such'. In popular culture the message may be straightforward: *they* have it, as much as we. Whatever else changes in the world, this is stable.

This goes for alien beings and bug-eyed monsters also, and as a science fiction reader, I have privately named this rule "the bug-eyed monster rule" in that field. Here, it says: the more different the society portrayed, like a world of bug-eyed monsters, the greater the need to inject our own gender traits and figures into it. If we meet a monster, there should also be a she-monster in the background. We may predict the he / she relationship with great certainty from the contemporary gender concerns in the period the literary work was written. The 'she' is either making the food or doing the dishes (1950s and 60s science fiction), or, later, a more independent yet secondary companion, always reflecting changing modern circumstances fairly well.

Science fiction is interesting precisely because it supposedly is about something else than what we have today, akin to a Rorschach test on the cultural level. Here, what was said earlier concerning the relative differences between our modern views of class, ethnicity / 'race' and gender once more come into view. In general one may probably say that the further science fiction moves away from current power relationships, the greater are its powers of imagination. Yet the treatment of the three is also markedly different, in the direction discussed: class and 'race' are given a much more varying and imaginative treatment. When it comes to gender, science fiction, with the exception of the handful of authors (like Ursula K. LeGuinn) who have consciously tried to disrupt the gender fixation, commonly turns narcissist or astrological. At that point, whatever exists *out there* becomes a mirror of ourselves.

This is just one thread in the huge fabric of gender as presented in popular and media culture. The traditional "Hollywood treatment", as in Cecil B. de Mille's movies, meant *their* class and centrality relationships (or some of them, like the slavery of ancient Rome) plus *our* gender and love affairs. This was all the more pronounced since, to put it briefly, 'going to the movies' involved precisely the kind of freedom discussed earlier in relation to the emerging gender market, so much so that a fair number of institutional rules (petting in the back seat, etc.) became developed in relation to it. These movies were not made in order to make people understand Roman-time conditions, rather the contrary; they became the stage for exploring and celebrating the new gender fabric of 20th. century culture and its new freedoms.

Today, there have been some subtle shifts in this scenery, and so if contemporary people and men in particular sometimes find themselves fleeing from genderisation, we also turn to it, not least with our personal life questions, like a crystal ball. The cultural picture, now as then, is not *there* so much for and in itself, but for us to recognise ourselves in. In this way, it 'works'. In sum, gender becomes a 'perspective object', creating a familiarity that becomes all the more important in circumstances where other things are alien and different.

2. *Visualisation as genderisation.* Three tendencies are connected in the much-debated topic of 'visualisation' of public life, the increasing power of television and related phenomena over the last decades. There is the visualisation itself, the genderisation tendency and an extended orientation towards performance itself rather than just an evaluation of its results. The visual media world of reflective surfaces is deeply connected to the modern concern with gender, once more not as biological issue but as visible body difference, what is demonstrably *there*. In practice gender not only works, it has become increasingly apparent and legitimate that it is worked-upon or worked-out also, even in the midst of its presupposed naturality. Gender performance incarnates 'performance' in the new sense, related to the devalorisation tendencies discussed earlier.

3. *The priority of gender.* The first rule concerns the universal *extensionality* of gender, the idea that gender is applicable throughout the social universe. The second rule concerns the correspondence between this 'all-around' vision of gender and the 'navel concerns' of contemporary society. The third rule involves its universal *priority*, the idea that gender and the dimension between the gendered and the neutral ranks first, while other kinds of difference are secondary.

The two rules of extensionality and priority often seem more fundamental than the rules *within* the gender system itself, including those relating to the distribution of benefits and burdens within the system. The ideal – and partial reality – of the modern gender system is that of a balanced and symmetrical relationship. On the other hand, asymmetry and discrimination may be admitted, although to varying extent. What unifies the various positions in this grand debate, however, is the agreement on the larger background frame that grants gender first place in 'being', that being is basically gendered being.

I have discussed the idea that women, if oppressed, must be oppressed *as women*, with its peculiar consequence of keeping on to the very framework that supposedly was to be put away, the one that told women their anatomy was their destiny. In Goffmann's (1977) paper on the arrangement between the sexes, this whole arrangement was questioned, i.e. not the oppression of women as women, but the prior movement placing some people in that position. Being oppressed *as gender*, in this framework, means saying the same thing twice, since there is oppression *in gender* already.

4. A fourth set of rules relates to the internal structure of the gender fixation. As in the case of sexuality, and often in close connection with it, the gender fixation extends into a modern mythological landscape with taboo as well as totem figures, appropriate and non-appropriate gender expressions, traits to remember and traits best forgotten.

5. A fifth set of rules relates to gender itself, now regarded as "symptom" or "figure", and its attachment to its "background". Like sexuality, gender overloads certain traits and relations, while hiding and distorting others. To the modern mind, imagining intimacy without sexuality may be difficult, yet imagining people without gender may seem simply impossible.

Taken together, all these rules imply that *if gender is what we speak of, patriarchy is where we are silent*. If the one is gloriously visible, the other is pushed all the more into the shadows. They also imply that notions like of power, like 'male power', rest on a wider cultural pre-positioning; patriarchal dominance is only seen as filtered through the gender system.

I emphasise that these 'appearances' also in a sense become realities. The gender view is closely tied to the feeling *and reality* of socially accepted being; the gendered filtering of views corresponds to a gendered reworking of reality. The point, therefore, is not that concepts like gender as power (etc.) are unreal, but that they are narrow. The rules of the gender system, here outlined on a cultural level, are closely bound to real-life issues and chances, with a basic message about being worthy of love, able to have a family, and have children. The rules encourage some kinds of acts, thoughts and emotions while discouraging others.

The rules are complex, but the basic message is also quite simple. If we imagined gender as talking, this is what it basically says to the person:

"As long as you accept me, I accept you! I raise you to a person, a free subject, while without me, your very self may not be there, if I left, it would be instantly endangered. Whatever you think *of* me, as long as you think *inside* me, '*with*' me, it is OK. Accept my rules, and you will live in psychic health and normalcy, you will be allowed to become personal, intimate, to *live* as something beyond necessity."

Gender does not talk, yet this message is indeed a message of recognition, success and power in our culture. So if gender is an *ideology*, it is also an ideology which is practically realised, turning full circle and becoming a very real key to personal life and development.

Does this "it" that we imagined speaking really care if the person is a feminist or a masculine chauvinist? Or are those only stage acts in the greater play? I think we should keep the latter possibility in view, even as we are living within it.

Finally, some words on two main sources of the gender fixation, which may also be seen as the same, yet from two different viewpoints, one psychological, the other societal. We do not have to look very far in the modern world in order to approach the psychological basis the gendered interpretation of people. Introspection and therapy are useful avenues. Much psychological evidence exists to the effect that by thinking in terms of 'gender', the modern individual is also enhancing or safe-guarding a sense of 'self', of being an acceptable social person. This relates to the ledge discussed earlier. Most of it is learned early in childhood and not easily thrown away.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, in a psychodynamic framework, one may ask whether we are at all enabled to anything like an 'objective' evaluation of gender, seeing how intimately gender

categories are bound to existential questions and survival of the self. I do not want to paint a too bleak picture, however. It is instructive to look at the gender fixation in a historical perspective, focusing on its patriarchal predecessor.

In the view that existed earlier, the world was in many ways *defined* by the patriarchal order, as was the individual's place within it. It was a world filled with particularistic, concrete, vertical social relationships that we would find limiting, and especially a larger sense of *authority* that would soon be suffocating.

We bring the current gender fixation into perspective by considering it as a replacement for *some* of the patriarchal framework that once protected the societal order from the perceived forces of chaos. The major changes between the two perspectives are of course not a matter of patriarchy or gender alone. Yet there is an inner relation between them, to be observed also in gender relations in our own century, where problems connected to authority have gradually given way to another kind of problems connected to performance and anxiety (Hem, L 1985).

I have also emphasised the dual character of devalorisation and the need to 'differentiate the difference'. The movement from the class fixation a few generations ago to the current concerns including the gender fixation does have a repressive aspect, both because major class problems remain unsolved, and because some of the new attention is even more reifying than the old one (Holter and Aarseth 1993). This is especially so since it often is more personal, and connected to more intimate forms of victimisation and degradation (chapter 15). Yet it also contains more horizontal social relations and wider choices; a return to the 'hard code' of political economy a few generations ago would scarcely solve our problems.<sup>20</sup>

## Gender as class

In gender studies and in feminist theory especially, gender is often described in a manner that resembles social class. People are seen as motivated by gender class interests in some of the same ways that class theory has held that they are motivated by class interests.

However, this '*gender class view*' exists as part of traditions that also have a lot to say on how gender is quite *different* from class, 'gender' in the sense of 'women' especially. Gender in this sense involves personal relations, intimacy, birth and socialisation, a more relational orientation a rationality of care (Wærness, K 1982) and other traits.

At the same time, there is the tendency that *as far* as gender is seen as specifically relevant as part of society, i.e. *as* sociological, it is in a class-like manner, where it tends to resemble the class category. Its 'otherness' instead tends to set it off from society, to disconnect it, especially from the political economy sense of society just mentioned.

The gender class view therefore often exists in some uneasy relationship to an 'otherness' view, sometimes connected to a separate mode of production view, a dilemma that has also been expressed in 'integrative' versus 'separatist' feminist

strategies. This has commonly been associated with a paradox of women's situation, 'below' but in some ways also 'beyond' the structures of society.

Many types of beyondness have been envisioned at this point, not least by men (cf. Derrida in Jardine 1987), partly in negative terms (woman as 'seat of distraction and fascination' as Baudrillard has said; a 'fatal object'; Baudrillard 1987:136). The feminine mystique and virgin / whore theme are close at hand in many of these treatments.

In a third view, gender, and gender in the sense of women primarily, primarily should be conceptualised in terms of being 'between' these structures. Women may be described as 'media' or even 'buffer zones' between men. This element is part of the gender market theory discussed earlier, where I argued that the exchange between men and women hides the exchange of women between men. Feminists and anti-feminists have both portrayed women's relations work, love or other activities as a kind of oil in the societal machinery. Women's work may even create the very relations of production. One may turn to a Levi-Straussian view of women as circulative units between the societal structures. Many variants exist within this 'between' perspective.

Comparing these three views, we notice that our old friend 'gender' once again twists and turns in the most disturbing ways. Only the first view, men above and women below, puts the focus squarely on both genders. In the two others, men tendentially disappear. So if there is a specific 'societal' position represented by gender, in these cases either beyond or between society's structures, it concerns women only, while men stay where they are, or rather, are once more conceptualised in the old 'neutral' ways. Tendentially they simply *are* the structures.

There is little doubt that the first view has been much more influential, especially in the public at large, than the two others; it is the one commonly associated with feminism. It is much more manifest on a cultural level than the two others. We may also notice that the first view is the only one that clearly corresponds to a dyadic notion of gender. This, at first, may seem a bit surprising, since this view has very little symmetry or balance attached. Rather, the gender as class view is here *brought into* the common gendered framework, with the effect that even if there are still two of them, the one now is placed above the other.

The resultant notion of the genders as two opposed classes may be interpreted as a view of *market classes*, or a conception of class reflecting its appearance on the market level.<sup>21</sup> Contrary to some interpretations of class theory, I do not believe that this necessarily means that the view is misleading, although it does imply that only some aspects of the whole come into focus. Instead one may argue, also in relation to gender area, that the market level is the 'executive' level of class, or one important part of it; this is where class becomes realised in the sense of socially effective or operative. Market equalisation (and not huge factories, etc. *per se*) is the primary site of negotiation and the primary background of class solidarity.

A simple two-class conception of gender, often with a tendency towards naturalisation of men in general and men's sexuality and aggression in particular, can be found in popular and semi-popular feminist literature, like Marilyn French's (1992) book *The*



*War Against Women*. French declares men not only a *class* but a *caste*, which in most people's minds means even more biologically determined. She writes that most men are robots blindly serving their patriarchal masters, are more effective than any secret police, behave like arrogant aggressive apes, and similar, which would have been classified as sexist had it been used of women (Holter, Ø 1994f).

These books often sell well, and once more a background problem of the analytical model is that it works a little too well. Not only does it clear the table like good critique should do, it also tends to halt further development, since *whatever* else can be said, it will *not* be as immediately simple and comprehensible as the model that has now been put there. So it gets stuck, as a stereotype, which easily fits into the rest of the gender fixation. Women's liberation and the struggle towards equality may now be portrayed as a *gender war*. The problems of a very similar model of class, basically dividing the world into the 'us' and 'them', are well known, yet feminists who disagree with the stereotypes mostly remain silent, perhaps due to the same kind of 'expediency thinking' that can be found in the class context.

There is a truth to the vertical class model of the genders, just as there is a truth to the similar model of capitalists and workers. What is needed, however, is an analysis of what exactly this truth entails, rescuing it from the stereotype, and connecting it to the truths that I think is there also in the 'beyond' and 'between' perspectives outlined. As discussed throughout this text, such a task cannot be solved at the level of gender alone, for here there is no doubt that different conceptions of patriarchy come into the picture. Only some comments on the class character of gender are therefore offered here, namely those that relate specifically to the gender system.

*Male dominance* may be interpreted in two main ways in this context. In one interpretation, male dominance is the result of patriarchal relations, or one main result; it is, once more, the 'executive' aspect. Another interpretation tendentially separates the gender system further from patriarchy, and instead defines male dominance as a category within the former. In other words, male dominance is not tied directly to what Connell (1995) calls men's "patriarchal dividend", but to what one could call their "masculinity dividend", perhaps a portion of the former, i.e. their specific benefits from enacting a certain form of masculinity.

Such material benefits do not, however, usually become operative on their own, or in a direct manner. The points made earlier regarding the gender system as a complex reciprocity relationship, the importance of transference and 'attempted solutions', and gender as a social psychological 'ledge', now reemerge, changing this dividend question into an identity or existential question. This is a main part of the agenda, although psychological and cultural aspects do not imply that the material ones are irrelevant. Instead the latter are often mediated through the former.

It is perhaps fit that the most sophisticated two-class views of gender have emerged in studies of men, rather than in women's studies. Class-like, gender-associated differences are perhaps larger, or at least more overt among men. These are views that put main emphasis on the *subdivisions* within each gender and between men especially.

## Gender-class subdivisions and hegemony

A main model in this tradition, introduced in chapter 6, is that of *hegemonic masculinity* (Carigan, Connell and Lee 1985; Connell 1987, 1993, 1995). The model goes further than the traditional notion of hierarchy; not only is there a top layer or 'subclass' within men's world, this masculinity also has the power of normalcy against deviance, of being the norm for everything else. Besides Gramsci (1971), the descriptions of hegemonic masculinity at this point have much in common with Stein Bråten's (1978) concept of 'model power'. It sets up the whole system and does not simply take a top dog position within it. Notions of hegemony and model power are diffuse and easily too embracive, but they do offer a way of approaching power in a 'rules of the game' sense, beyond what happens within it.<sup>22</sup>

As argued earlier, notions of hierarchically organised masculinities have been fruitful in terms of recent research, and have also recently been used not just in the 'overtly' masculine areas like private and domestic life but also in analyses of less overt areas like the public domain (Hearn 1992). My critique of the masculinities paradigm can now be rephrased in terms of the gender fixation. Unless contextualised, i.e. reoriented as one part of a wider inequality or patriarchy analysis, it becomes misleading. It tends to repeat a too narrow approach, derived from feminism, now used towards men. For example, it is true that class issues among men are *also* gender issues. Rewriting them into the latter is no help, however; what is needed instead is research that focuses on gender, class and 'race' issues in combination on the background of patriarchy analysis. None of these issues are clarified by filtering them in terms of one of the others; all of them, in combination, create the conditions of inequality which is the central topic of concern. So my argument is not very original: it leads back to the old truth that gender equal status questions cannot be isolated from other questions of social equality and domination.

On that level, masculinities can contribute with very important partial answers. One main topic is the recurrent reactionary movements towards reinstalling the 'leadership of men' for example in the US, along with a certain notion of Christian family values. What are the dynamics behind such movements? Possibly, masculinities and male power motives are indeed a main factor, but I think other matters come into it too, like the threat of family dissolution, an experience of alienation and a non-caring indifferent society. Understanding these issues once more necessitates a concept of modern patriarchy and its relationship to capitalism. At the same time, such movements as well as the oppositional currents against them, often become 'operative' precisely on the level of gender, and in ways that make hierarchical and hegemonic masculinity models highly relevant.

In Connell's (1995) most recent and detailed presentation of the masculinities framework, some of its possibilities and problems are highlighted. Connell uses the framework in order to uncover conflicts that are described much as I would do, yet with patriarchy issues 'built into' the gender concept. This raises a number of phenomenological, structural and a historical questions, and I shall concentrate on the latter here.

Connell emphasises that masculinities, and gender in general, should be seen as historically varying, and he offers some new contributions to a historical analysis.

Especially, he argues that the early modern imperial frontier soldiers like the conquistadors were the first masculine characters in a modern sense:

"The men who applied force at the colonial border, the 'conquistadors' as they were called in the Spanish case, were perhaps the first group to be defined as a masculine cultural type in the modern sense." (Connell, R 1995:187).

"The conquistador was a figure displaced from customary social relationships, often extremely violent in the search for land, gold and converts, and difficult for the imperial state to control. (..) Loss of control at the frontier is a recurring theme in the history of empires, and is closely connected with the making of masculine exemplars." (ibid.).

This is a good observation, but some questions arise, regarding the framework of interpretation. If this was the first masculinity, what existed before? A 'manly' order of a different kind? In Connell's terms, this must have been a change in the 'gender order', the concept he uses to cover gender and patriarchy both. The gender order is defined as a structure of social practice, combining power, production and emotions (op.cit.71pp.). In his framework, then, the conquistadors represented a new gender order.

Yet he also describes them as a historical "*first*", which I think is indeed what the historical material shows. We are left with a theoretical inconsistency – gender appears as something new, yet in a framework where it must be much older. In my view, the historical insight should take pride of place, especially when it also fits the structural analysis. I believe that the conquistadors did in fact represent a new order that was to have drastic consequences. More material in this area is presented later (chapter 12). In order to understand this change, however, gender defined simply as 'practice', together with a vision of what men and women do *as* men and women whatever the context, will not do: instead it leads astray, into more or less misleading generalities regarding sexed organisation. Unlike Connell, therefore, I do not define gender in terms of 'practice', but a specific, socio-economically *formed* practice in a specific historical system. It is a system that can be found in one context only, modern capitalism, and I believe it presupposes human beings *as* capital commodities. In other words, conquistadors and their violent 'proto-masculinism', still mainly kept within a framework of lords and dependants, not one of the 'democracy of men', must be understood within a specific early capital accumulation, colonisation and absolute appropriation context.

Connell's exposition of the connections of masculinity to modernity is sometimes very close to such a view, but he does not draw the theoretical consequences, and so even if he emphasises the modern character of gender, he also often slips back into the transhistorical realm. For example, he quotes a study by Joan Mellen which has "traced a narrowing of the emotional range allowed to masculine heroes from early in the [20th] century" to the present day (op.cit.214), but it is not clear whether this is something unique, or just another form of an old process.

This is in a context where he argues that "*the importance of exemplary masculinities has probably increased over the last two centuries with the decline of religious legitimations for patriarchy in the West*" (my emphasis). This is true, and a much

more wide-reaching truth than Connell makes it into. Here he is in fact addressing 'masculinities' as something *different* from patriarchy – and, *nota bene*, alongside *religion* instead. Yet this view does not inform the rest of his text.

We should ask: what if this sense of masculinities as legitimation and modern-day religion of patriarchy is in fact the basic one? In that case, Connell's and other gender researchers' idea that masculinities *equals* patriarchy would be *very misleading indeed*, and the religious connection clearly brings this out. It would be comparable to understanding European feudalism according to its own self-portrait rather than the facts.

We may follow this parallel a little further: such a self-image need not at all be only an apology for the present conditions of power, there could be appeals for reform, for the making of better Christians – or men. Here, Bråten's theory of model power again comes into view; the ruling model always has some place for opposition – on *its* terms. We know that feudal conflicts were made thematic and played out primarily in religious terms, as a matter of cleaning out the un-Christian elements, etc., and we also know that this thematic horizon left very important parts of the societal context in the dark, while distorting others. How do we know that gender, or at least the 'exemplary masculinities' mentioned, do not fulfil a similar role today? When it is said that patriarchy was more 'open' in feudal times than in the modern world, this is a statement with relative validity only; it seems open *to us*, but it was seldom if ever described 'as such'; instead it *was* constantly circumscribed, or ideologised, into religious matters. In the modern world, there can be little doubt that gender does have some similar ideological aspects, and there is the possibility that these are seriously overlooked in most current studies. It should also be clear that an emphasis on gender as ideology does not imply it has no real or effective force; much has been said to that point above, and one may compare the formidable power that was indeed represented by the 'belief' or ideology of religion in the Middle Ages.

## Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to disentangle modern gender from the ahistorical conception of gender as well as from concepts of gender-related power. By following three main threads in the weave, that of sexed organisation, patriarchal organisation, and gender organisation, we may understand more of the whole and how its patterns reveal but also disguise social processes. We may keep a relation between gender analysis and analysis of alienation, reification and other topics of a commodity-critical framework, without collapsing gender into a *pro et contra* commodity issue. Instead of dissolving the relevancy of commodity analysis, a more nuanced approach to gender and the multidimensional context represented by gender makes it more relevant, while at the same time pointing to a reorientation of commodity analysis as such, a topic I approach in the next chapters.

How far does patriarchal organisation itself imply some form of gender system, or 'self-addressing' system of subordination? At some point, the distinctions made between sexed and patriarchal organisation breaks down, logically speaking. If patriarchy is defined as subordination of women and related forms of subordination, some form of sexed organisation transmission link is required; even in the most 'non-gendered' society, there comes a point where this order will have to address its

members *as* sexed, or in terms of sex. Even if patriarchy, instead of gender, is defined as a system of lords and dependants, we shall have to explain precisely why sex is brought into it, why women are worse hit than men.

What has been attempted here is not a denial of the fact that sexed organisation plays some role in patriarchal organisation everywhere. Rather, my argument is one of variable relevance, as social and historical fact, vis-à-vis the solid-state link that is often assumed since some connection logically exists. For understanding this solid state, we must go to current-day circumstances, since its transhistorical existence is neither empirically derived nor theoretically warranted. In brief terms, I conclude that gender systems analysis, sexed organisation analysis, and patriarchy analysis are three related but different areas of inquiry, each to be treated as subjects on their own. This is very different from the current convention of collapsing gender and power, and / or making patriarchy into a local version of some eternal gender order. It is a critique of the current gender fixation with the patriarchal neutralisation in its background, two distortions operating in tandem. It creates more nuanced interpretations of empirical material, while keeping a link to feminist as well as other critical theory.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Coe, Snow & Benson:196.

<sup>2</sup> Common language usage itself illustrates fairly well how this organisation appears, in the phrase "men and women", supposedly equal, yet men first, women second.

<sup>3</sup> Foucault, M 1978:106; rightly emphasised by Rubin, G 1994:85.

<sup>4</sup> The virtual non-existence of racism in antiquity has for long been recognised. In a recent paper on slavery in classical Athens, Øivind Andersen (1995:199,174) argues: "The slaves can be plotted on a wide dimension. They did not belong to any special race, nor did they carry any special slave costume. In the city, the slaves could not be told apart from the free." He also finds that sex differences in slave prices were small compared to skill differences.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Karin Widerberg's (1987:56) critique of activity-based analyses that assume that the genders "are 'really' identical." The activity basis in this case is halfway. Men's activities and/or wage work activities are used as the normal standard. On that basis, activity analysis of course implies sameness on male premises. Widerberg offers no argument why activity analysis by itself should do so. In the view presented here, instead, the 'really' identical and the 'really' different are two sides to the same arrangement. This much-appraised difference is not of the 'long-ear/short-ear' type in the example given initially: it does not lead *beyond* the notion of identity but is instead complementary to it.

<sup>6</sup> Or one may say that the qualitative identity is present only in the form of gender as such, gender as generic (cf. chap. 3); the *kind* of quality is not brought forth. On the other hand, this common quality is primarily expressed in *money* outside the gender system.

<sup>7</sup> In retrospective, the idea of opposing 'physical' (or 'materially sensuous') sex to gender, instead of the usual 'biological sex', was important, even if I was not quite aware of it in 1980. Today I would emphasise that this sensuality is quite a different category from that of biological sex (cf. surgery as means of 'real' gender change). The sensuous-material part ('physical sex') is as much a social issue as the 'social sex' part; and so the whole two-layered category becomes problematical, basically due to an assumption that nature should in some way be included, the balancing act described earlier.

<sup>8</sup> In some traditions this is not only a circle, but also one which it is impossible to get out of. It defines *meaning as such* – no less. Language itself is gendered, "with the feminine as basic reference point and

primary source of the creation of meaning" as Karin Widerberg (in Taksdal & Widerberg 1992:294) says of French feminism.

<sup>9</sup> "Patriarchy also seems outdated ['passé'] as a concept, at least in a scientific setting." (Karin Widerberg in Widerberg & Taksdal 1992:295.)

<sup>10</sup> Marx: 'vergegenständliche' Arbeit; 'sachlich' as in "Das Kapital wird als Sache gefasst, nicht als Verhältnis" (Marx 1974:169). – Unlike English, German (and Norwegian) allows one to see this as an ordinal variable, as notions that also are connected to the degree of reification, with 'thinglike' as the stronger form, 'sachlich' (Norw. saklig) as a weaker one. 'Objectified' can be used in this last sense, yet that muddles the distinction discussed earlier between objectification as result-making *versus* reification.

<sup>11</sup> Even Mary Wollstonecraft (1982:84), writing (ca. 1791) in a context where women are directly compared to men, uses "the sex" of the former.

<sup>12</sup> It is indicative of contemporary thinking at the time (at least in Norway) that this paper was ridiculed by the editor of the left-wing paper *The Class Struggle* in terms of its author having discovered that 'orgasm was a capitalist invention'. Mixing feminism and Marxism was seen as dangerous among orthodox in both camps.

<sup>13</sup> The experience of Gayle Rubin (1994) – embraced as early feminist, ignored as 'deviant' sexual person – is interesting in this regard.

<sup>14</sup> For a debate on homosexuality and sociological theory cf. Seidman et.al. 1994.

<sup>15</sup> Heidegger 1990:47 introduces *Dasein* as "man's Being" and further defines it in terms of the facticity of the conscious self, "those structures of Being which belong to the entities we encounter in addressing ourselves to anything or speaking about it".

<sup>16</sup> Referring L. J. Jordanova i Mac Cormack & Strathern: *Nature Culture and Gender*, Cambridge UP 1980:49, here p. 70.

<sup>17</sup> While I regard Marx's value *forms* arguments highly, his *value* arguments have always seemed a bit too circular to me. *Either* we presuppose that people are basically labourers, and so when people are identified through exchange, what is involved, as third quality, must be 'labour'. *Or* we do not, but then we are left with the value *forms* that do *not*, I believe, by themselves say LABOUR. The latter is said by *Marx*, true, but that is something else again. As discussed in chapter 13, I am not disagreeing with a wider, common-sense interpretation that says activities are usually involved, that the amount of labour does have some impact on price, and so on. Yet the much stronger assertion, leading into the 'science' of historical-dialectical materialism, that man *basically* is labouring animal, that no commonalty (real abstraction) can be established on other grounds, and so forth, is a dehumanising, mechanistic, industrial-societal ideological point of view, as well as a masculinistic one.

<sup>18</sup> On a psychodynamic level, transubstantiation may perhaps be connected to Freud's notion of cathexis. By 'cathexis', Freud meant psychic charge or instinctual energy attached to a mental object, which here as elsewhere may be a historical-sociological notion disguised as a general term. Connell (1987:111-12) defines cathexis as "the construction of emotionally charged social relations with 'objects' (i.e. people) in the real world". As in the case of Sartre, the object designation is not transhistorical, but connected to the facticity of gender, which is an important part of the objective 'thereness' of others. In this perspective, cathexis is definitively a secondary relation, one bridging a gap that is already there. This is further discussed in terms of utility in chapter 13.

<sup>19</sup> The existence of strong sociopsychological mechanisms at this point has been documented for example by John Money's studies on hermaphrodites and the "deep identity programming" that follows even biologically false classifications of children with "ambiguous" sexual attributes.

<sup>20</sup> The gender fixation – from a less serious (?) point of view:

The 3rd Church of Gender, somewhere someday [part of the historical texts of the middle androgynate ]

**Lord Gender;**

**1 You who express the ever legitimate division of Man and Woman, Masculine and Feminine**

**2 Your honour be praised by all; let all see the transhistorical glory of Your creations**

**3 Let me never waver in my identification of You and Your works and let no experience shake the basis of my [prayer's gender] identification**

**4 However much I change let me always keep the deep inner core of You inside me**

**5 Let me never be tender without gender**

**6 Help me love in your reign, the reign of gender, meeting the Other through You**

**7 Take my lusts and hates and my wants and longings and let my offerings feed Your holy spirit of gender and help me recognise the world as a genderised world**

**8 Save me from insignificance and isolation by bonding me with the rest of humanity; help me practice You as my way to (love) life, help me become a social individual beyond my poor corporeality by way of Your holy uplifting spirit, and let Your rule and practices be my rule and practice**

**9 May my organ never [...] astray [...] [text lost]**

**10 All-encompassing Duality and Synthesis be yours, absolving all weakness and constraint; let man and woman unite in You; let Your light be theirs, for now and for ever,**

**Amen.**

<sup>21</sup> Weber's market class notion and his monetary concept of capital have been criticised by many, e.g. Godelier, M 1971:63pp.

<sup>22</sup> Mao also wrote influentially on hegemony; and although his Chinese version of dialectics remains problematical vis-à-vis the Hegelian tradition, it is not necessarily worse. One may read Mao as trying to avoid a too unilinear Becoming – just like China was trying to avoid the Russian way to communism – and diverging into traditional Chinese essentialism instead. For recent evaluations of Mao's role cf. Lupher, M 1992; Zweig, D 1990; on Gramsci's hegemony cf. Przeworski, A 1980.