

Womans's exclusion from the creation of culture

Reality through twisted mirrors

By SYLVIA HALE

*This is not the world of physics
locked in an endless dance;
oblivious of you.
This is your world. You are subject
here
it is your insanity which stares
back at you.
Dance, mindless puppet, towards
oblivion.
S.M. Hale*

This exploration into the world of women is based on the ideas of Dr. Dorothy Smith, and the poetry of R.D. Laing. Responsibility for this interpretation, however, rests with me.

To be fully human is to be SUBJECT: acting in history to change and recreate the world, as against OBJECT passively subjected to the world. Alienation, in the familiar Marxist sense, arises through loss of control over one's produce; it is the lot of working men to become objects, cogs in the machines driven by others and for other men's interests. But what of women? What is their product? Where are they found in the division of subject and object?

Twisted mirrors split the path between the realms of wives and families, and the doors of corporations. As the locus of production shifts from household into factories, wives and home fade into the twilight zone of "private life". They appear only as spectres in political economy, important as potential labour when the man-power runs out.

But the freedom has strings; the paths surround. For the working poor the dependent nature of that freedom is all too obvious, manifest in the incessant struggle to keep a family together on low income. Responsibility for production of the home falls directly onto women. Their work, their ability to manage, is fundamental. Their dependence on the corporation is second hand, mediated through their husbands ability to provide the money. His authority in the home is based on that dependence and conditional upon that employment. To this secondary dependence can be traced the constant anxiety of poor women. The success of their world is dependent on contingencies of their husbands' behaviour. Women joined the temperance movement, not to spoil the fun but to drown the terror.

With affluence and security of employment, these conflicts recede.

But the ties still bind. Their force made all the harder because they are unseen. Only madwomen chafe at invisible chains.

In the corporation the working man does a job; but the middle class man plays a role. To the corporation the laborer owes his product, but the middle class man owes his mind. His thoughts and his actions, his motives and his ideas belong to the office. His product, but also his person becomes relevant-the kind of person he is. He plays the role and lives the image, and to the middle class family falls the work of creating and sustaining this image. The middle class home is the symbol of

the man's work. His activities are translated into money which is displayed in the home through his wife's labours. With the identification of social class with styles of life, it becomes the woman's responsibility to manage the image which befits the class.

But the image is not hers, nor produced for her benefit, but subcontracted to her by the corporation. The media creates the image. Opulently illustrated magazines present the new "display order" - the new styles, materials, furniture and decor, the arrangements for the home beautiful, the home efficient, the home livable, indeed the home reputable. In terms of this she is judged. Her work is trivialized, her skills irrelevant - except as a buyer, honoured for her taste, her ability to find bargains - to be a "Good little shopper." The image becomes the objective; imposed from outside, packaged from outside by the corporations which deliver the goods.

*One is inside
then outside what one has been
inside*

*One feels empty
because there is nothing inside
oneself*

*One tries to get inside oneself
that inside of the outside
that once was inside
once one tries to get oneself
inside what*

*one is outside:
to eat and to be eaten
to have the outside inside and to
be*

*inside the outside
But this is not enough. One is
trying to get
the inside of what one is outside
inside, and to
get inside the outside. But one
does not get
inside the outside by getting the
outside inside*

*for;
although one is full inside of the
inside of the outside
one is on the outside of one's own
inside*

*and by getting inside the outside
one remains empty because
while one is on the inside
even the inside of the outside is
outside*

*and inside oneself there is still
nothing
There has never been anything
else*

and there never will be

R.S. Laing Knots [1970,83]

The maintenance of the image requires more than the decor. It requires the permanent work of managing the tensions which the corporate structure generates but cannot relieve. The impulses of anger, the despair, the fear of death and failure, the anxieties have no place in the corporate script. They must be managed elsewhere. To the women is subcontracted the work of curing the injuries, managing the tensions, giving the emotional support to the husband. Here is the double bind, the twisted circle. To support him in his role is to support the very system which violates him. To be a good homemaker she cannot let him fail

in his role. To be a "good wife" she must side with the external system against him.

Middle class children are also part of the image as "products" of the woman's activities. Their dress their neatness, their cleanliness, and their manners display her abilities as a Mother. Her love is objectified in the externalized and generalized evaluation of the child. Love is transformed into anxiety and anxiety corrupts love. The double bind again. She must manage her children so they appear 'well behaved' and 'good'

to that external order. Her failure to make them meet that order becomes proof that she does not love them. In the end she must willingly release her product, her children to the school and the occupational world - the release of the children as individuals to the corporate enterprise.

*My mother loves me.
I feel good.*

I feel good because she loves me.

I am good because I feel good

I feel good because I am good

*My mother loves me because I'm
good.*

*My mother does not love me.
I feel bad.*

*I feel bad because she does not
love me*

I am bad because I feel bad

I feel bad because I am bad

*I am bad because she does not
love me*

*She does not love me because I am
bad*

R.D. Laing Knots [1970,9]

What reality emerges from this twisted mirror? The reality that family is blamed for mental illness. The corporation is rational. Insanity has no place there. It too is subcontracted. The reality of these chains are hidden in the isolation of the family from the corporation. One could explore further, but the commitment is so deep - the costs so high. It would transform the value of all the work she has done, all she has to hold on to, if the work had no joy and the product no reward. Slam that door shut.

Psychiatry handles the misfits; cleansed, abstracted, analysed. The symptom, not the situation is the problem. Women are neurotic. Depressed because they suffer from depression. Why do you chafe at nothing? You should be fulfilled, contented, happy. You do not have to work to earn your living. You should be grateful. The ultimate rebellion. Edith turns on Archie Bunker. But the worn turns again. This is menopause! Once more the double bind. To stay is masochism. You must want to be there. You can't stand up alone. To leave is failure. One should stick by those whom once one loved and try to help.

*She does not think there is
anything the matter with her
because*

DR. DOROTHY SMITH

will lecture on

WOMEN'S EXCLUSION FROM THE
CREATION OF CULTURE

Edmund Casey Auditorium S.T.U.

11.30 - 12.30 noon

Thursday, March 13

Evening seminar for senior students

& faculty on Wednesday, March 12

S.T.U. Faculty Lounge

Dr. Smith is Professor of Sociology

at O.I.S.E. Toronto.

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