

ily as a place where moral authority is transmitted through religious ritual and ceremony. The moral unity of the family, however, is undermined by the wave of feminism which removes women from the home and attenuates men's dedication to their careers. Besides fragmenting personal life, contemporary conceptions of the family go against nature. The disintegration of family life also has irreversible effects on children. Without proper training their souls are devoid of passion and incapable of education. They lack the striving for wholeness that links desire and education. Here, predictably, Bloom links desire to respect for order and authority rather than to freedom.

Bloom's account of the decay of modern society is supported by a critique of secularization. In a long and free-wheeling survey of the disenchantment of culture and politics, which constitutes the middle section of the book, Bloom places the burden of responsibility on rationalization for stripping away the metaphysical/religious grounds for political and moral authority. Rationalist (read secular) thought has replaced religion and metaphysics with a rampant subjectivism which sees thinking and acting as the creation of a solitary subject.

Political modernity begins with Machiavelli, who substitutes politics for the soul and continues with the transformation of virtue into self interest. When still tied to the Protestant ethic, however, self-interest has a redeeming moment clearest in the political theory of Locke. Locke's moderate balancing of enlightened self-interest is for Bloom, the basis of the American polity so admired by the Straussians.

Locke's political solution, however, is unstable. It can not fully contain the forces of secularization and the subjectivization of culture. The romantic quest for unity and spontaneity represents, for Bloom, the flip side—the dark side—of bourgeois culture, and this reinforces the tendencies toward a subjectivist interpretation of the self. The continuing disenchantment of the world has led to the rejection of nature as a teleological order. Freedom comes to be understood as pure activity. The romantic notion of culture does try to introduce moral order as a counter to disenchantment. But this substitute for religion breaks down. It loses its original universal reference and becomes exemplified in a plurality of cultures grounded in "rootedness" and "ethnicity."

The terminus of modern rationalization is found in Nietzsche who, according to Bloom, holds that reason's disenchantment of the world is the source of its own dissolution. Although reason undermines religion it is incapable of finding its own foundation. Reason requires the

abandonment of rationalism.

This insight, if true, would seem to undermine Bloom's own position, based as it is on a form of classical rationalism. However, Bloom bypasses this problem and extends his critique to modern education. Influenced by (primarily German) ideas of value-relativism and subjectivity, modern intellectuals have lost sight of the true purpose of the university. They teach the equality of values, and treat value choices as irrational ultimate decisions. Human activity becomes infinite freedom and creativity without respect for its necessary limits and awareness of the anarchy of pure freedom.

Far from being a refuge for great minds, the university is democratized. It is this threat of democracy both in the university and in society which Bloom fears the most. According to Bloom, democracy exemplifies interest detached from reason. It represents only mass opinion, and follows the concerns and fashions of the times, not the permanent truths of the cosmos. Bloom pays lip service to democracy, but denies that collective deliberation is the basis for a rational judgment.

Bloom's animus extends to socially disadvantaged groups as well. He can barely conceal his resentment against women and racial and sexual minorities who assert their own needs or desires against the supposed harmony of the whole.

Bloom's tragic lament for the fate of modernity contains its element of farce. His "solution" to the dilemma of disenchantment resorts to a magical incantation to the ghost of lost souls. Like the neo-conservatives, he takes the results of Max Weber's theory of rationalization and attempts to read back into it conclusions that the theory cannot hold. While Weber concluded that the power of religion to integrate society, culture and economy into a whole is inevitably lost in the transition from religious/metaphysical to modern worldviews, Bloom simply postulates as given a religious need that can be fulfilled only by returning to the traditional notions of the sacred. No grounds are given for this argument, nor does it seem to follow from the implications of secularization. It is a dogmatic assertion implicit throughout Bloom's book. The conservative critique of modern culture presumes that there can be no moral unity without a religious consciousness. There is, however, no reason to rule out a secular or non-transcendental conception of social solidarity—a notion internal to social life itself.

Bloom's analysis of secularization equates modern rationality with a kind of instrumental reason—one which leads to subjectivism and relativism. While Bloom may have touched on some of the pathologies of modern society, he has not

shown that modernity itself is pathological. Here his analysis confuses cause and effect. The fragmentation of culture is not due to modernity or to its form of rationality, but to the effects of a capitalist modernization. It is this process which selects out and favours the dominance of instrumental rationality, and which is at the root of the reification of culture. Bloom, however, wants to convert a social process into one that occurs mainly in the heads of intellectuals. Misguided intellectuals are at the core of the problem.

The ultimate effect of Bloom's proposal is to invalidate the experience of students. The conservative theory of human nature and the hierarchical ordering of the soul that Bloom proposes, impose an order on the drives and desires of individuals based not on the potentialities of social life, but on an historical metaphysics which conceals its own ideological basis. The alienation and devaluation of experience leaves the student open to manipulation under the guise of tutelage supposedly based on the interests of reason. These best interests, however, restrict the student's own potentials to find happiness and solidarity in relation with others.

This tactic is evident in Bloom's book. The reader is constantly told that students are incapable of judging what is good for them. They must be led to the truth by master (and primarily male) teachers. In Bloom's view the skill of the teacher lies not in a capacity for rational persuasion, or productive dialogue with students, but in erotic performance. The erotic power of the teacher is aroused and stimulated by the rapt desire of virgin students to be filled with the master's power. This interpretation of eros seems less like the dance of lovers than the last tango of erotic domination. Based on power rather than concern for the other, it places the performance of the teacher at the centre of the process.

For those of us who do not view education as a process of libidinal bondage, Bloom's view may strike us—with good reason—as perverse. The act of teaching requires a respect for the independence of learners and a willingness to listen and be educated. In a similar way the notion of culture used by conservatives is not, as Bloom seems to think, a "single coherent object" created by gods or geniuses, one which restrains and dominates an uncivilized everyday life. Far from being the solution to the educational problems of today, *The Closing of the American Mind* is a symptom of the depth of the crisis.

Brian Caterino underwent considerable education most recently at the University of Toronto. There he had a chance to observe Allan Bloom first hand. Currently, he holds the Walter Benjamin

folding chair at a library near you.

Gender and Expertise

Edited by Maureen McNeil

London: Free Association Books, 1987 266 pp.

Women have always had a lot to say about scientific rationality. But their observations have taken many different forms. In 1792, long before there was an organized women's movement, Mary Wollstonecraft argued that the inferior position of women resulted from the fact that most women did not have access to education. A true daughter of the Enlightenment, she believed that the position of women would improve only when they had the means to become as 'rational' as men.

This theme has been voiced in feminist writings as recent as those of Simone de Beauvoir, who believed that women, being closer to their 'animality', were prevented from transcending their immediate situation and thereby entering the world of cultural creativity.

Fortunately, in the years since, the scope of the debate has become broader and more complicated. Feminist approaches to rationality and science are more heterogeneous and diverse. They emanate from a number of sources including those women engaged in practical struggles, such as the women's health movement, to women involved in academic endeavours; the latter consist notably of feminists taking a deconstructive approach to the gendered metanarratives that mark Western thought.

Nevertheless, few feminisms have managed to disentangle themselves from the association of woman with nature; fewer still have stopped to problematize such slippery conceptions as rationality, expertise or technology.

Liberal feminists have, for the most part, pursued Wollstonecraft's concern about women's access to the professions and trades traditionally dominated by men. For them the only problem with expertise is how to get more of it. And it is in part due to their efforts that the number of options available to women has greatly expanded—particularly for middle and upper class women. But these so-called equity projects stop short of questioning the gendered relations of power through which expertise is defined.

In an interesting, if predictable twist, liberal feminists have also been active at important sites of popular struggle where gender and expertise have been the focus of theoretical work, namely the women's

health movement and the peace movement. Women in these movements have mounted a powerful critique of both the medical system and the military complex, arguing that because of women's closer relationship to nature and their experience as caregivers, they are in a unique position to take on the phallogocentrism of scientific rationality and to construct 'feminine' alternatives.

This position has found a strange bedfellow in that espoused by radical feminists who want to develop an alternative women's culture as a counterpoint to the violent irrationality of the male world, a philosophical approach that has been expressed eloquently in Susan Griffin's book, *Women and Nature—The Roaring Inside Her*, and notoriously in Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*.

To some extent it has been left to socialist feminists to push approaches to scientific rationality beyond the thorny problems of the woman/nature — man/culture split. Some of these attempts have met with varying degrees of success, a fact that is strikingly evident in *Gender and Expertise*, a new collection of essays and reviews edited by Maureen McNeil (Number 19 in the Radical Science Series).

While this volume covers a diverse range of topics and viewpoints, most of its contributors have taken a decided position against the essentialist equation of women and nature. Instead, they tend to emphasize a materialist perspective on the relationship between the position of women and the constitution of expertise in late capitalist society.

There is always danger in generalizing; however most of the essays in *Gender and Expertise* can be roughly located within a Marxist feminist camp, emphasis on the Marxist. Similar in many ways to other work produced by the Radical Science Collective, *Gender and Expertise* displays strong links to the labour process approach to technology first articulated by Harry Braverman; his influence is felt most clearly in the section on Work.

Sonia Liff's article, "Gender Relations in the Construction of Jobs," for instance, attempts to move beyond a narrow analysis that examines the sexual division of labour in the workplace, to one that acknowledges gender as a dynamic in the development and structure of the labour process, including the adoption of technology. Equally important is her assertion that the social relations of the workplace are a significant force in the construction of gender.

But the overwhelming feeling we get when reading this book is that, despite protests to the contrary, a feminist analysis has simply been grafted onto a Marx-

ist framework. Anne Karpf, for example, states in her article, "Recent Feminist Approaches to Women and Technology," that "I am interested in how Marxist analyses of technology can be amplified and enriched to consider the effects of technology not only on class relations but also on gender relations."

This is what we call the "add gender and stir" approach. We would argue that this approach does not adequately address the complexity of the problems surrounding the constitution of gender, knowledge and expertise — in the 'hard' sciences or in the study of social issues. This, in fact, is a problem that arises throughout *Gender and Expertise* primarily because the authors never really tackle how we define expertise, science, technology, or gender for that matter. The first three concepts are used in such a way as to further muddy the conceptual waters.

The result in many of the articles is a continual semantic slippage: technology, for instance, is seen variously as a *process* or a type of *object*, imposed on the gendered subject from without. This has two immediate consequences: firstly, it renders women passive in the face of a technological juggernaut; secondly, by giving technology a life of its own, discussions of this sort fall short of challenging the constituent elements of technological practice.

Furthermore, as Pam Linn argues, there is more to technology than just hardware:

On its own, matter is nothing at all. For us it never exists in that asocial sense. It is always constituted in the social practices of language and other forms of representation, in traditions of use, with associated techniques and training procedures, in domains of knowledge, and

in relations of production and consumption. In short, technology is a cultural product.

Leaving aside the articles by Linn, Donna Haraway ("Contested Bodies"), and to some extent McNeil, the tendency to 'thingify' technology is a problem throughout *Gender and Expertise*. This is in no small part due to the productionist tendencies of Marxist thought. Other feminists, by taking up the issue of representation, have had more success in tackling how technologies and the 'value-free' practices of science are gendered cultural productions.

Borrowing from the traditions of literary criticism and psychoanalysis, theorists such as Evelyn Fox Keller, Jane Flax and Sandra Harding have attempted "to read science like a text" in order to reveal its social meaning. These studies share, as Flax has put it, "a profound skepticism regarding universal (or universalizing) claims about the existence, nature and powers of reason, progress, science, language and the 'subject/self'". Central to this project is a deconstruction of representations of gender and expertise as a point of departure for the analysis of social life in late capitalist societies. Upon such an understanding, emancipatory practices can be developed.

To the credit of *Gender and Expertise*, all of its contributors share a commitment to developing transformative strategies. Articles on adult education, teaching girls science, reviews of books about a famous scientist (Barbara McClintock) and a not-so-famous black nurse who tended the soldiers during the Crimean War (Mary Seacole) are much appreciated. Pam Linn's description of her involvement with the Technology Networks, set up under the auspices of the Greater London Council, adeptly

describes the obstacles encountered in transforming the power relations that define technology, not the least of which is sexism. And last but not least, the 30-page critical bibliography included with *Gender and Expertise* is an invaluable tool.

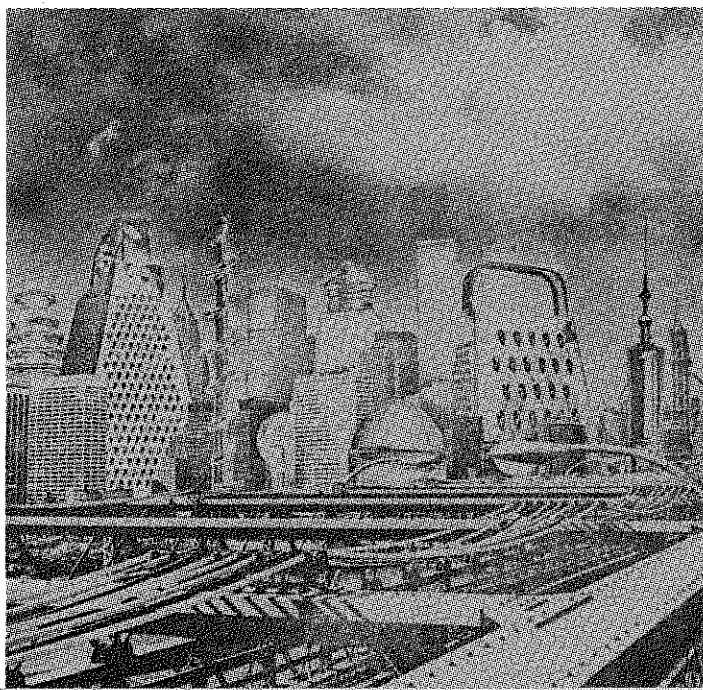
In certain sense the strengths and the weaknesses of this collection are epitomized by McNeil's call (in "Being Reasonable Feminists") for the need to develop "really useful" feminist knowledge to liberate women. On the one hand, the emphasis on practical strategies is a pointed antidote to Left intellectualism. On the other hand, it's something of a red herring to demand "really useful" knowledge without specifying the power relations that capitalize on some forms of knowledge as "useful" and discount others.

To be blunt, how can we begin to resist gendered technologies without understanding the technologies of gender?

Although *Gender and Expertise* is an accessible introduction to current feminist directions, its theoretical lacunae underline the need for a more adequate theorization of gender in analyses of expertise with respect to the sexual division of labour and the constitution of women's subjectivities. More generally, it seems clear that a progressive politics and science will have to include a self-conscious and critical examination of the relationship between the social experience of its creators and the kinds of knowledge that get produced.

As Sandra Harding puts it on the last page of *The Science Question in Feminism*, feminist theorists began their work knowing that the tasks ahead would be difficult. "But I doubt that in our wildest dreams we ever imagined we would have to reinvent both science and theorizing

Metropolis II, Christopher Plowman
reprinted from *Gender and Expertise*



itself in order to make social experience."

Katherine Scott is a York University and Women's Press. Peter Laurie is a graduate student at

Selling Culture: B. Vreeland and the New Reagan's America
by Debora Silverman
New York: Pantheon

Theodore Adorno amateur is incomprehensible in the museum. Indeed it is the collection between the scholar and the uneducated who have created and the uneducated have reluctantly captured an audience, which has an atmosphere of uncertainty. The present crisis of the museum is the result of the waning of the museum in the wake of the modernist movement, also attendant on the capture of an audience wanted in the first years by a Frenchman, years ago, that "if it is to visit a museum of everything," he said. Repeated surveys thirty years have shown that the audience has remained middle-aged. Children, elderly and the women are conspicuous by their absence. A political tendency in the seventies followed economic hardship and an attempt to justify itself by trying to broaden its audience to make money. Although our are undoubtedly conservative trend in the money-making priority. The absurdity is pointed up by the nature of the museum's personal collection of crats and scholars' teeth and seventies.

It is against Debora Silverman. Much of its force is comfort at the income not only into the museum within it reserved curator-consultant position is Diana Vreeland and ex-editor's Bazaar. After the cultural art

self in order to make sense of women's social experience."

Catherine Scott is a graduate student at York University and a member of the Women's Press.

Peter Laurie is a freelance writer and a graduate student at York University.

Selling Culture: Bloomingdale's. Diana Vreeland and the New Aristocracy of Taste in Reagan's America

by Debora Silverman

New York: Pantheon Books 1986

Theodore Adorno once wrote that the amateur is incomparably more comfortable in the museum than is the expert. Indeed it is the conflict of interest between the scholars and connoisseurs, who have schooled the modern museum, and the uneducated public, whom they have reluctantly come to see as their audience, which has created the current atmosphere of uncertainty. Although the present crisis of the museum is largely a result of the waning of government funding in the wake of economic decline, it is also attendant on the museum's failure to capture an audience which it never really wanted in the first place. The fear expressed by a French curator some forty years ago, that "if the public at large took to visiting museums, it would be the end of everything," has proved groundless. Repeated surveys taken over the last thirty years have shown that the museum audience has remained middle class and middle-aged. Children and youths, the elderly and the working class are conspicuous by their absence. The populist political tendencies of the sixties and seventies followed closely by increasing economic hardship, have led museums to attempt to justify their existence both by trying to broaden their audience and make money. Although the two endeavours are undoubtedly linked, a neo-conservative trend in government led to the money-making project attaining first priority. The absurdity of the entire exercise is pointed up by recalling the elitist nature of the museum: its origins lie in the personal collections of cultivated aristocrats and scholars of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

It is against this background that Debora Silverman's book is to be read. Much of its force comes from her discomfort at the incursion of the amateur not only into the museum, but the domain within it reserved for the expert: that of curator-consultant. The amateur in question is Diana Vreeland, socialite, *raconteuse* and ex-editor of *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. After an introduction setting the cultural and political scene, Sil-

verman begins with two events: Bloomingdale's "China" campaign in the fall of 1980, and Vreeland's concurrent exhibition of Chinese imperial court dress of the Ching dynasty (1644-1912) at the Metropolitan Museum's Costume Institute. The interest in Chinese exotica is further traced to the costumes worn by Nancy Reagan and others at Ronald Reagan's first inauguration in January 1981. The second chapter covers the period 1981-84, when Diana Vreeland presented three shows at the Costume Institute with French Culture as their theme. They were: "The Eighteenth Century Woman" which detailed the extravagant and frivolous lifestyle of the French aristocracy on the eve of the revolution, "The Belle Epoque" looking back at Parisian high and low life just prior to the First World War, and Bloomingdale's campaign "Fête de France" which immediately followed it. "Twenty Five Years of Yves Saint Laurent" was a retrospective of the works of this *haute*

couture designer who is a close personal friend of Vreeland. The third chapter is an extended review of Vreeland's memoir, *D.V.*, which was marketed by the museum in conjunction with the Saint Laurent exhibition. Chapter Four describes the exhibition "Man and Horse," a display of equestrian clothing used by the English aristocracy, and notes its sponsorship by the designer Ralph Lauren. The final chapter traces these equestrian and Anglophile themes through Reagan's second inauguration and other mass cultural events in 1985. Two other exhibitions, Vreeland's "Costumes of Royal India" and the (Washington) National Gallery's "Treasure Houses of Britain" are also described. The book has numerous black and white illustrations of material from the exhibits and sales campaigns, as well as the principal persons mentioned in the text and some comparative historical material.

Silverman sees all these events as being closely connected to the expansion

of political neo-conservatism. While Reagan and his entertainment and fashion associates posture on stage, social services are dismantled to feed the maw of the industrial-military complex. Silverman has set herself an extremely ambitious project, especially when the work purports to be little more than "a discrete cultural reading to stimulate thought and discussion." Unfortunately, the issues that this book tries to tackle are far beyond the intellectual tools brought to bear on them.

One of Silverman's constant refrains is the lack of scholarship and correct museological practice, evident in Vreeland's displays. She defines a good museum exhibit as one which fills three criteria: correct historical interpretation, public education, and technical perfection. Silverman has apparently little background in museology and seems not entirely aware of recent developments in this field. Even the most hidebound of curators have been forced in the present



Diana Vreeland in her Park Avenue Apartment
photo: Pricilla Rattazi, reprinted from *Selling Culture*