*Dear all, thank you for reading my paper on Juliet Mitchell and the intellectual history of second-wave feminism. I am hoping to submit it as an article to an intellectual history journal toward the end of this year, though I have a lot of work to do in clarifying my argument and especially the stakes of my analysis (and reducing repetition!). This comes through most clearly in the introduction and the conclusion, which I am not very satisfied with. Your help especially in deepening my historical claims, in 'lifting up' out of the density of Mitchell's work, would be incredibly useful.*

*The paper at this stage is caught between two interests, one is a claim to Mitchell's personal importance in the history of feminist thought (and of the Left generally), the other is an attempt to use Mitchell as an optic to understand how feminism challenged existing assumptions and epistemologies. The latter concern emerged partly in dialogue with my reading on the 'post-structural' and 'linguistic' turn in history, and kind of latent within the paper is an attempt to understand why the studies by Eley, Dworkin, and Sewell all claim, without a clear explanation, that feminism was a crucial catalyst for this shift (many of the women and the British journals they gesture to were linked directly to Mitchell). This is really the context for my 'methodological' intervention, which in its current form needs to be much more precise (or perhaps eliminated entirely). I would especially like to know if you think that it works, or if it detracts from the importance of Mitchell herself or the nature of the paper.*

# Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis, and the Challenge of Second-Wave Feminism in Britain

Of all the theoretical problems facing second-wave feminists, few were as difficult as the fact that women's oppression seemed at once historical and universal.[1] In order to explain the nature of that oppression and the means to overcome it, the Women's Liberation Movement delved across the disciplines, cobbling together history, anthropology, social theory, and economics when no existing conceptual framework seemed satisfactory. The theories that resulted– de Beauvoir and the existential Other, Firestone and sexual reproduction, Delphy and the sexual division of labour, Rubin and the 'sex-gender system' – appropriated canonical thinkers and turned them to radical new purposes. Even though the paradox remained painfully intractable, each new formulation opened the terms for new inquiry. This article contends that,

[1] 'Second-wave feminism' is a label that developed after the decline of the organised Women's Liberation Movement, however I find it useful as a means to distinguish between those women preoccupied with questions we might label 'feminist' but who did not participate directly in the Women's Movement. By this account, Germaine Greer or Eva Figes, two important British writers for the movement, would be included in the term 'second-wave feminism', though they were not directly involved in the Movement itself.

for the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain, Juliet Mitchell's appropriation of Freud and Marx in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* so forcefully reformulated the terms of the debate that she also, through a new conception of sexual difference, provided the means by which it was transcended.

The Women's Liberation Movement was an activist movement grounded in intellectual production and it is their theories as well as their politics that rendered it the most successful movement of the late twentieth century. Though recent histories of the Movement have elegantly detailed to the variety of feminist politics in the 1970s, demonstrating that political divisions were sharpened in debate across common subjects, we know little about the theoretical underpinnings that divided 'socialist', 'radical', 'revolutionary', and 'cultural' feminisms.[2] Intellectual and cultural historians of the twentieth century have begun to situate feminist thinkers with regards to existing debates on the family, decolonisation, cultural materialism, and structuralism, suggesting that feminism constituted one part of the general challenge to Leftist orthodoxies in the years around 1968.[3] But, where histories of Movement politics focus inward on the Movement alone, the intellectual accounts sublimate the history of feminism to their primary subject. By dividing social history and intellectual history so sharply, the distinct

[2] On Britain, for example, see Jeska Rees, "A Look Back at Anger: the Women's Liberation Movement" *Women's History Review*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (2010), pp. 337-356; Natalie Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); George Stevenson, "The Women's Movement and 'Class Struggle': Gender, Class Formation and Political Identity in Women's Strikes, 1968-78", *Women's History Review* Vol. 25, No. 5 (2016), pp. Eve Setch, "The Face of Metropolitan Feminism: the London Women's Liberation Workshop, 1969-79", *Twentieth Century British History,* Vol. 13, No. 2 (2002), pp. 171-190.

[3] Camile Robcis, *The Law of Kinship: Anthropology, Psychoanalysis and the Family in France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); Todd Shepard, *Sex, France, and Arab Men, 1962-1979* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2017); Denis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1997); Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal, Ithaca: McGill-Queens University Press, 2007); Daniel Rodgers, *Age of Fracture.*

theoretical challenges second-wave feminists faced, and the challenges they posed to existing knowledge, have thus been largely unexplored.

The intellectual history of feminism therefore speaks to intellectual history's concern with concepts and their influence, and feminist history's focus on the challenge of 'gender'. In tandem, it offers a window into a dynamic of 'gender' as a concept that has been implied since Joan Scott's famous 1986 essay but has remained unexplored. Scott posited gender to be a category of 'empty and overflowing' meaning, and thus offered gender as a frame through which seemingly unrelated issues are articulated and conceived.[4] Concerns over the 'universalism' of women's oppression and the use of canonical social theory to answer it suggests an opposite relationship: that the exigencies of rethinking 'gender' demanded that the foundational precepts of social and political thought be reconceived. By putting sexual difference at the centre of a theory that said little about gender, such as Marxism, how did the central terms of that theory reconfigure? Or, conversely, if gender is indeed a central node of meaning, as Scott suggests, what conceptual changes are catalysed by shifts in existing notions of gender? In this sense, rather than an external index of difference that imbues meaning, 'gender' can constitute a challenge from within, one that appropriated central notions within a theory or worldview while also shifting the priorities within it.

Here, I propose a new intellectual history of second-wave feminism by studying the thought of Juliet Mitchell, one of the most influential theorists of the Women's Liberation Movement, and her turn to psychoanalysis in the 1970s and 1980s. Though Freud was one of the most reviled thinkers for feminists of the early second-wave, Mitchell famously argued in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* in 1973 that psychoanalysis as "not a recommendation *for* a

[4] Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", *American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 5 (1986), pp. 1053-1075. See also Herzog, Sex After Fascism (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2005); Shepard, Sex, France, and Arab Men (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2017).

patriarchal society but an analysis *of* one". Mitchell and her circle in London, which took in such notable names as Jacqueline Rose, Laura Mulvey, Mary Kelly, Sally Alexander, Barbara Taylor, Rosalind Delmar, Elizabeth Cowie, Parveen Adams, among others, proceeded to transform the Anglo-American feminist and leftist orthodoxy around Freud in the 1970s. Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak, Simone de Beauvoir, Antoinette Fouque, Luisa Passerini, Judith Butler, as well as those outside the movement from Gareth Stedman-Jones to Martin Jay have all cited Mitchell's central influence for their own *rapprochement* with Freud.

In order to heed the challenge that feminist questions posed to existing social theory, I follow Mitchell closely from her first attempts to theorise 'the problem of women' in 1966 to her final account of 'sexual difference' and women's oppression in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. The Continental emphases of the British New Left and of existential anti-psychiatrists in the 1960s meant that Mitchell began to question the nature of 'women' as a political or ontological category very early. By 1970, she had already alighted upon psychoanalysis as a science that could explain the construction of femininity and the function of women in capitalist society. The difficulty, however, was the melding the idealist account of psychoanalysis with the theory of domination and historical materialism demanded by Marxism. The meeting point of these two theories seemed to be the family and it was in response to socialist feminist debates on the nature of the private and the public that Mitchell began to rethink both psychoanalysis and socialism. In the process of reconciling these two phenomenon – the creation of 'woman' and the structural function of 'women' for capitalism more generally –Mitchell arrived at a theory of 'sexual difference' that resembled the Marxist dialectic but that diminished notions of reproduction and displaced notions of production entirely. This theory would prove central to major British

feminist works and institutions in the late 1970s and 1980s, and arguably underpinned one of the central challenges to historical materialism in the British left.

## I – WOMEN IN THE NEW LEFT

For many years, it seemed that each socialist generation had to discover the problem of 'women' anew. In post-war Britain, that challenge began with Juliet Mitchell's "Women: the Longest Revolution", published in the *New Left Review* in 1966. Mitchell had been born in 1940 to an intellectual family with leftist-anarchist inclinations: her mother, a botanist, was the family breadwinner and a single parent for Mitchell's early childhood (her father was a Canadian scientist known only by his letters and never by his person). A little older than most in the Women's Liberation Movement, she matriculated for the entirety of her schooling at a small, independent and co-educational institution in North London and she was already familiar with Marx and the socialist tradition before she read English at St Anne's College, Oxford from 1958.[5] This exceptional upbringing contributed two defining features to her early career. The first was that, after the equal-abilities approach of her education and of her upbringing, the gender segregation and separate standards of Oxford were an immediate surprise.[6] Though this burgeoning awareness did not translate into her undergraduate work or her two attempts at doctoral study, it is notable that she began writing a book on 'women's forgotten history' as early as 1962. The second, not unrelated, was that Mitchell never had trouble expressing herself in the idiom of the left. Compared to many of her future feminist peers like Sally Alexander and Laura Mulvey, whose reflections are studded with mention of early intellectual insecurities,

[5] Much of this account is taken from a rich oral history conducted by Alan Macfarlane at Cambridge in 2008. https://www.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2516402

[6] See, for example, her later discussion of gender inequality and 'amnesia' produced by Oxbridge in Juliet Mitchell, "An Academic Amnesia", *Twentieth Century: Oxford, a Portrait of a University*, vol 179, no. 1046-1047, (1971), pp. 22-23, esp. 23.

Mitchell was remarkably confident and extremely erudite.[7] Recollections, especially for the years before 1970, depict her as a little fearsome: beautiful, stylish in dress, in command.[8] She developed firm friendships with the student left at Oxford, from which almost all the intellectual 'second' New Left graduated, and she married the prominent student writer Perry Anderson in 1962. When Anderson was appointed editor of the *New Left Review* that same year, Mitchell joined the editorial board as the only woman.

"Women: the Longest Revolution" was born from an editorial meeting of the *New Left Review*, in which members planned future articles on the Marxist analysis of undertheorized groups. Amidst a cavalcade of post-colonial conflicts – Algeria, Rhodesia, Zanzibar, Cuba, Malaysia – Mitchell's suggestion that she write about women provoked surprise and scorn. In direct response to her colleagues, then, the article began with the prominence that 'women' had been accorded in early Marxist texts, before offering a critical evaluation of that treatment in Fourier, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Babel, and de Beauvoir. Mitchell argued that each account, by either rendering women a 'symbol' of socialist progress or by subsuming women into a study of the family, had reproduced the major bourgeois ideology: that the family was a unified, natural entity. As a result, the Marxists had assumed that women's oppression was the product of capital, in the form of private property, working upon biology. Mitchell's remedy was to differentiate women's functions within the family and within the public sphere: "production", "reproduction", "socialisation", and "sexuality". She argued that women's oppression was a 'complex unity' composed of the historically specific configuration of these functions, and that historical specificity had been disguised by bourgeois ideology.[9] She thus challenged the 'myth' of

[7] Laura Mulvey, "Introduction", *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. viii; Sally Alexander in the *Once Upon a Feminist*
[8] c.f. Sally Alexander, Sally Alexander in the interview for Sisterhood & After, Rosalind Delmar, Barbara Taylor
[9] Juliet Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution", *New Left Review*, No. 40 (1966), p. 16.

women's natural oppression and the family's natural unity by dissecting the reality of each function and its contribution to capitalism in history and in her present moment.

Mitchell's configuration of women's oppression in terms of family and function was indebted to a spate of works on women that had emerged throughout the post-war period. The sharp distinction between reproduction and motherhood, often thought of as the division of biological 'sex' from socially-constructed 'gender', had been central to the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedman, and Margaret Mead, among others.[10] The division was particularly evident in Britain, as the prominence of Kleinian psychoanalysis and a discourse around women's "double lives" distinguished motherhood in early infancy from motherhood generally.[11] These insights, all referenced in "Women: the Longest Revolution", rendered contingent the arrangement of gender relations in the family and in public.

To them, Mitchell added the heterodox Marxism of Louis Althusser, whose 'Contradiction and Overdetermination" appeared in translation in the *New Left Review* in 1967.[12] The two fundamental claims of that essay – that "the contradiction between Capital and Labour is never simple but always specified by the historically concrete forms and circumstances in which it is exercised" and that "history 'blazes its trail' through the multiform world of the superstructure" – gave Mitchell the terms to explicate the historical configuration of women's situation and to locate that situation primarily in the superstructure, not the 'material base'.[13] In other words, Althusser's 'multiform superstructure' allowed Mitchell to forgo both the 'economic' and 'biological' determinism in existing accounts of women's position. "Women: the Longest

[10] Shira Tarrant, *When Sex Became Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2006);Sandrine Sanos
[11] Michal Shapira, *The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), Helen McCarthy, "Social Science and Married Women's Employment in Post-War Britain", *Past and Present*, Vol. 233, No. 1 (2016), pp. 269-305.
[12] In the issue that directly followed Mitchell's.
[13] Mitchell cites the French edition of *Pour Marx.* As discussed below, Mitchell was, in her own words, "not a linguist" and probably also leaned on an early draft of Brewster's translation. Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination", Ben Brewster [trans] *New Left Review* No. 41 (1976), pp. 15-35.

Revolution" thus argued that women were defined by their function in capitalist society and by the relationship between this function and the natural 'family' ideology that disguised it. The essay therefore foreshadowed the looming Women's Liberation Movement by arguing that only the overhaul of the entire social and economic structure, not the entry of women into production, would ensure their liberation.

Debates about the nature of 'economic determinism' had been central to the British New Left since the foundation of the *New Left Review* in 1960. Attempts to grapple with rising affluence and apparent class mobility had produced a vibrant literature that privileged culture and ideology as much as production and labour.[14] These debates, especially the work of Raymond Williams after whom Mitchell named her article, therefore shifted the focus of Marxism and the nature of consciousness and class conflict.[15] The dynamism of British Marxism continued into the so-called 'second' New Left, a younger generation of scholars to which Mitchell belonged and her husband led. This second New Left began to look further afield for theory and politics, turning to thinkers like Gramsci, Lukács, and Althusser to understand the ways that imperialism exceeded simple terms of economism and decolonisation of industrialisation and class conflict.[16] Reflections on national liberation movements thus formed the direct context for "Women: the Longest Revolution", both literally in the editorial meeting where she first proposed the subject of her article and more generally, in the consideration of

[14] Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Post-War Britain.*
[15] Mitchell mentions her intellectual debt to Williams in Juliet Mitchell, "Juliet Mitchell", Michelene Wandor, ed., *Once a Feminist: Stories of a Generation* (London: Virago, 1990), pp. 111
[16] Compared to historiography of France, where this generation '68' looms large, the British historiography has remained primarily interested in the historians of the 'First New Left', especially EP Thompson. On the French turn to the 'East', see Camille Robcis " 'China in Our Heads': Althusser, Maoism and Structuralism", *Social Text* Vol. 30, No. 1 (2012), pp. 51-69; Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995).

new forms of inequality, oppression and expropriation that seemed to exceed a Marxist model centred on exploitation and class conflict.[17]

More than a simple addition of women, "Women: the Longest Revolution" therefore represented an important contribution to the New Left's re-evaluation of Marxism. By positing that Marxism had reproduced the dominant ideology around 'women' and the 'family', Mitchell's critique was of a piece with Anderson and Tom Nairn's reviews of the quiescent English working classes or Gareth Stedman-Jones' reappraisal of conformist accounts of English history.[18] This critical attitude toward 'consciousness', in particular, divided the 'first' from the 'second' New Left. While the 'first' New Left was indebted to cultural models of consciousness, which offered the basis for revolutionary collectives, the 'second' New Left, prone toward new social theory from France, tended to see 'consciousness' as a bar to revolutionary ferment. This gave critical theory its importance and led to an immense emphasis on the critique of existing orthodoxies, such as the 'bourgeois family ideology'. Mitchell's analysis was thus not concerned with 'women's consciousness' in the sense of women developing a sense of their collective oppression as a class. In fact, she argued the following year that she did not believe such a consciousness even possible, as class conscious was defined by one's relation to the system of production, while women's oppression was not.[19] Instead, Mitchell trumpeted a kind of 'critical consciousness' that was, in effect, a critical awareness of the fiction of the bourgeois family and

[17] Mitchell has given multiple different inspirations for "Women: the Longest Revolution". In her 1984 essay collection she cites Frantz Fanon, among others. See "Women: the Longest Revolution" in *Women: The Longest Revolution* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp. 17-18.
[18] Anderson, "Origins of the Present Crisis", *New Left Review*, No. 23 (1964), pp. 26-53; Tom Nairn, "The Nature of the Labour Party - I", *New Left Review*, No. 27 (1964); Gareth Stedman Jones, *The Pathology of English History*, No. 46 (1967), pp. 29-43.
[19] Juliet Mitchell, "Women's Work", *New Statesman* (4 August 1967) as excerpted in "Scandaniavian Women (A55)", *Women and Law Collection: Women's Studies Archive: Issue and Identities, Gale primary Sources, Women's Studies Archive* [https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=DVI-Manuscripts&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=5&docId=GALE%7CHXPDZQ373510267&docType=File&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZWST&prodId=WMNS&contentSet=GALE%7CHXPDZQ373510267&searchId=R1&userGroupName=columbiau&inPS=true] accessed 26 January 2020.

a recognition of the actual economic and social function that this ideology disguised. This was the classic move of the young leftists: the slippage between ideology and practice was the condition for potential revolution, but immediate action was required before ideology quickly reconfigured.

This is not to say, however, that Mitchell's focus on women fit directly into existing accounts offered by the New Left. Though the second New Left had staked their claim with theory and Continental philosophy, Althusserians they were not – or not yet. [20] Mitchell's article was the first in the *New Left Review*, and perhaps the first in English, to make use of Althusser and this had serious effects on the structure of the essay and the focus of the argument. It was as much for its Marxism as for its topic that fellow editor Quintin Hoare published a sustained criticism of Mitchell's essay.[21] Hoare argued that, by refusing to situate women within the family and thus within the longer trajectory of economic development, Mitchell had failed to "unite all these structures into a meaningful totality".[22] Of course, as Mitchell was to reply, "This separation of structures is precisely my point. Bourgeois ideology provides us with a unificatory concept – 'the family'. A socialist strategy for women should try to disrupt this monolithic unit".[23] Hoare's assessment missed Mitchell's "point" that the family was not a unit, but it also misunderstood the Althusserian claims that had underpinned it. By focusing on this failure, which he located in the fact Mitchell "*excludes* history from her analysis", Hoare highlighted

[20] Two previous references from the previous year made only passing reference to Althusser as part of a longer list of new French Marxist theory, the first in Anderson's response to Thompson "Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism", *New Left Review* no. 35 (1966), p. 31 and the second by Ben Brewster, Althusser's translator in his introduction to a translation of Gorz, "Presentation of Groz on Sartre", *New Left Review* No. 37 (1966), p. 31.
[21] The critique was the first written by an editor and directed at work within the journal. It caused a minor uproar and there was an event held in London to discuss it, though Mitchell did not attend. Sheila Rowbotham discusses this controversy in *Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties, pp.*
[22] Quintin Hoare "Discussion on 'Women: the Longest Revolution'", *New Left Review* no. 41 (1967), p. 80.
[23] Mitchell, "Reply to Q. Hoare", *New Left Review*, 41, Jan/Feb (1967), pp. 82. Mitchell later recalled that Hoare had seen her reply and had changed his own criticism accordingly, somewhat muting his missteps toward Althusser. The incident left her, by her own account, furious and somewhat estranged from the *Review*. See Mitchell, "Juliet Mitchell" in Michelene Wandor, *Once a Feminist: Stories of a Generation* (London: Virago, 1990), pp. 107-112.

precisely where Mitchell's analysis broke new ground. The question of 'origins' remained the topic of concern in the major New Left debates about class relations in particular. While the much discussed Nairn-Anderson thesis, for example, claimed that the present crisis was "structural", both Nairn and Anderson still placed the explanatory emphasis on the origins of British capitalism.[24] Mitchell, by contrast, isolated individual structures and their relation in the present moment alone, interested less in origin than in function. The focus on 'function', not origin, evident in her definition of 'woman' in "Women: the Longest Revolution" was therefore crucial shift for the Left and the starting point for Mitchell's future work on socialism and feminism.

## II – CONSCIOUSNESS, COUNTERCULTURE AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The debacle surrounding "Women: the Longest Revolution" did not shake Mitchell's resolve to rethink Marxist definitions of women and the family, though it did provoke two pressing questions, both of which would shape her future research. The first was the label for women's situation, which Mitchell had called, among others, a "problem", "exploitation", "subordination", "enslavement", and a "pyramid of discrimination".[25] This was surprisingly inexact for someone whose argument had also rested on the need for precision, and the search for clarity was therefore a central theme of Mitchell's work after 1966. The second was the question of consciousness and experience, so central to debates within the Left and of increasing importance in the emerging student movement. Though "Women: the Longest Revolution" had been centrally concerned with bourgeois ideology, the article said nothing about the thoughts and experiences of the men and women under that ideology. The absence was notable, since Mitchell had also argued that critical awareness of the limits of ideology was the "precondition" for

[24] The classic articles are: Anderson, "Origins of the Present Crisis",; Nairn, "The Nature of the Labour Party - I". Contrast with Anderson, "Components of the National Culture", *New Left Review*, No. 50 (1968), pp. 3-57.
[25] Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution", p. 14, 12, 16, 33, 35.

revolution. "What was missing", she later identified, "was how we lived ourselves as men or women".[26]

This intellectual search was also social. Mitchell by and large abandoned her duties on the *Review* after the uproar her article caused and she began to associate with other groups of the Left, including a number of early women's groups in the US and the anti-psychiatrists in London linked to R.D. Laing and David Cooper. It was with this countercultural audience in mind that Mitchell secured a book contract in 1969 with Pantheon, an imprint of Random House in the US that published and translated many of the classic countercultural works from Sartre, de Beauvoir, Foucault, and R.D. Laing and David Cooper.[27] Cooper became Mitchell's partner after her marriage with Anderson ended, and it was he who introduced her to André Schiffrin, the head of Pantheon books, with whom Mitchell enjoyed a lasting personal and professional relationship.[28] Her relationship with the anti-psychiatrists around Laing and Cooper was cemented when she joined the executive committee of their new "Anti-University", "an on-going experiment in the development of consciousness" established in London in 1968.[29] She ran a class on women and revolution that met on alternate Friday evenings and she sat, again, the only woman on the board.

Few popular intellectual movements in Britain embodied so completely the counterculture of the 1960s, and its emphasis on authenticity and individualism, as anti-psychiatry.[30] Blockbuster hits, Laing and Cooper's books argued that hierarchical family structures and repressive social norms distorted the child's sense of self and resulted in mental illness, even, as

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[26] Wendy Holloway, Juliet Mitchell, Julie Walsh, "Interview with Juliet Mitchell – *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*: Then and Now", *Psychoanalysis, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 20 (2015), p. 116.
[27] Schiffrin, *The Business of Books*, pp. 44-5.
[28] André Schiffrin, *The Business of Books: How International Conglomerates Took Over Publishing and Changed the Way We Read* (London, New York: Verso, 2000), esp. pp. 42-48. Through Mitchell, Schiffrin also began to publish many of the most-influential British feminists in the United States.
[29] Oisín Wall, *The British Anti-Psychiatrists: from Institutional Psychiatry to the Counter-Culture, 1960-1971* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 98-103.
[30] Deborah Cohen, *Family Secrets*, pp.; Iain Ferguson, "Making Sense of Madness: Revisiting RD Laing", *Critical and Radical Social work*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2018), p. 75.

in Laing's most famous work, in schizophrenia. Feminist ideas were beginning to emerge in many circles in the Left in London, from the International Marxist Group to American anti-war expats in North London, and by 1969 these different independent groups formed the London Women's Liberation Workshop.[31] Anti-psychiatry, with its emphasis on family and selfhood and its debt to Sartrean existentialism, dovetailed well with many of the concerns of this new feminist movement, itself deeply influenced by de Beauvoir's own existentialist account of women's oppression.[32] Mitchell's dissertation project at the University of Leeds, where she worked as a lecturer in Literature, took up anti-psychiatry's notions of 'authenticity', 'family' and 'being-in-itself' to examine how children became adults in English literature's most famous nineteenth-century novels.[33] There were also traces of Laing and Cooper in her analysis of "socialisation" in "Women: the Longest Revolution", which had illustrated the dangers of the bourgeois ideology on the child's, rather than the mother's, sense of self.[34]

In the years between 1966 and 1970, Mitchell began to apply these same concepts to analyse the consciousness of women, especially the link between young girls and social roles. She called repeatedly for an end to raising children within a specific sex role, which she claimed restricted the growth of young women into whole individuals.[35] Her book proposal from 1969 extended this analysis to adulthood by proposing to study prominent academic theories of 'womanhood' in

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[31] Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*; Celia Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left: Sixties Activism and the Liberation of the Self*

[32] Teri Chettiar, "The Psychiatric Family: Citizenship, Private Life and Emotional Health in Welfare-State Britain, 1945-1979" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Northwestern University 2013), p. 307.

[33] The dissertation was never finished but a selection of the chapters were republished in her own book: Juliet Mitchell, "*Wuthering Heights:* Romanticism and Rationality" [1963-4], "*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*: A Sentimental Education" [1971], "*What Maisie Knew:* Portrait of the Artist as a Young Girl" [1972] reprinted in Mitchell, *Women: the Longest Revolution*, pp. 127-194.

[34] "Women: the Longest Revolution", pp. 25-6.

[35] [35] Women's Liberation London, "ICA Women", *Black Dwarf*, Vol. 14, No. 19, June 14 (1969), p. 9. Accessed: http://www.banmarchive.org.uk/collections/blackdwarf/_bd_issue22_complete.pdf [29 Jan 2020]; Juliet Mitchell, "Women are exploited: an interview with Julia [sp] Mitchell", *Forum: The Journal of Human Relations*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (1970), p. 5 in JM Archive, University of Essex, Published Articles + Reviews & Interviews Box.

relationship to women's experiences of these categories.[36] The argument women were defined in relation to the family. She therefore began to translate anti-psychiatry's critique of family, society, and identity into the language of 'ideology'. The category of 'woman', she judged in her proposal, was "a role distortion of identity" with little to do with "the psychical, psychological reality of any particular woman". These criticisms of women's stereotypical roles were central to the early Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), which begun to plaster stickers on sexist advertisements and protest Miss World. Still, Mitchell's conclusion was striking for an embryonic feminist analysis. Following the distinction between social norms and authentic selves made by the anti-psychiatrists, and building on her link between 'woman' and 'function' in "Women: the Longest Revolution", Mitchell held that only freedom from the notion of 'woman' could "allow men and women to be as different as their individuality required them to be".[37] She concluded, in other words, that 'women' did not exist as a collective entity at all.

By the time that the Women's Liberation Movement began to securely take hold in 1969, then, Juliet Mitchell had moved from questioning the 'natural' function of women within the family to questioning the existence of women at all. Her attempt to supplement the Marxism of "Women: the Longest Revolution" with an account of subjectivity, a central pursuit in both the New Left and the WLM in this time, had actually driven the two theories further apart. It is therefore notable that her anti-psychiatric work on womanhood as 'role distortion' made little mention of Marx.[38] One part of this lay in the difficulty of reconciling anti-psychiatry and

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[36] Letter to Andre Schiffrin with proposed book outline, 23 March 1969, Unnumbered Box, "Correspondence includes publisher contracts & conference information, Tapes not of Juliet (don't appear to feature Juliet)", Juliet Mitchell Collection, Arthur Sloman Library, University of Essex.

[37] Juliet Mitchell, "Women are exploited: an interview with Julia [sp] Mitchell", *Forum: The Journal of Human Relations*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (1970), p. 4 in JM Archive, University of Essex, Published Articles + Reviews & Interviews Box. See also the discussion of childhood in Untitled Manuscript, dated March 1969 p. 7 in "Talk Transcripts and Interviews (Including Published Copies) Box, JM Archive, University of Essex.

[38] Mitchell mentioned this in an interview with Spare Rib after the publication of *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*: "I was then really interested in *why* radical therapy had never contributed anything. It had never cohered with a

Marxism on the family. Anti-psychiatry offered an account of the family as a fundamentally social sphere, in which the family determined social, and by extension, economic relations. Marxism, certainly in the form Mitchell approached it, offered the bourgeois family ideology as a mystification of material production and social reproduction. The tensions in her thought between consciousness, "material function" and bourgeois family ideology thus remained, only this ideology now included the notion of 'woman' as well.

Nor did spread of alternative theories of women's oppression in the earliest years of the WLM help Mitchell reconcile Marxism and anti-psychiatry. Mitchell rejected the alternative formulation of 'sex' as class, which saw the sexual division of labour and women's domestic work as the foundation of women's oppression and therefore a site for women's consciousness as a class.[39] In a response to Margaret Benston, perhaps the first iteration of the 'domestic labour debate' that would be central to the WLM, Mitchell argued "Not only is [domestic work] not the only aspect of their 'oppressed' position, but in itself it", by which she meant women's position, "has a complexity that insists on new formulations".[40] Judging the 'domestic labour' accounts insufficient in their Marxism and their feminism, Mitchell therefore entered the beginnings of the organised Women's Liberation Movement with her two pressing questions – on the function of women for capitalism and the nature of 'women' in consciousness, and ideology - strongly in tact.

Psychoanalysis was the answer that unwound these intellectual knots, but the context in which Mitchell first read Freud in the summer of 1970 was crucial for the particular shape of her

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Marxist, Left analysis of the position of women", Carol Morrell, "Interview about New Book *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*", *Spare Rib*, 22 April (1974), p. 116. Emphasis in original.

[39] Margaret Benston, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation", *The Monthly Review* [September 1969], https://monthlyreview.org/2019/09/01/the-political-economy-of-womens-liberation/ [accessed 3 Dec 2019].

[40] Juliet Mitchell, "Response letter to Paul Sweezy" 13 Oct 1969 in, "Reviews and Unpublished Book Drafts folder", JM Archive, University of Essex.

interpretation and, indeed, of her investment. Freud was one of a number of texts that Mitchell read within the History Group, a feminist reading group established by Mitchell and her close friend Rosalind Delmar after the First National Women's Liberation Conference in Oxford in 1970. As Margaretta Jolly and Natalie Thomlinson have demonstrated, chains of friends and family directly shaped women's involvement in second-wave feminism and the History Group is a testament to the ways that feminist theory, too, had strong social and institutional dynamics.[41] Like Mitchell, Rosalind Delmar, Sally Alexander, Anna Davin, Mary Kelly, Laura Mulvey, Branka Magaš, and Mary Kennedy had all been involved in left politics for a number of years, their connections forged through counterculture publications like *Black Dwarf, 7 Days,* and the *New Left Review*. All were university educated, most at Cambridge or Oxford. Over half of them were in serious relationships with men on the editorial board of the *Review*; Magaš herself was also a member.[42] Their work and thought, like Mitchell's, therefore emerged at the intersection of Left and feminist reflections on Marx, consciousness, and base and superstructure. Along with Barbara Taylor, Parveen Adams, Elizabeth Cowie, and Jacqueline Rose, who joined the later Family Group and Lacan Reading Group, these women also constituted the hub of the psychoanalytic tendency in British feminism for the next three decades. It was a period of intense collaboration and intellectual growth, and Mitchell later recalled that it was as though "*Psychoanalysis and Feminism* sprang Athena-like from all our heads".[43] "It produced a space", Delmar reflected, "in which we could find a common language, inhabit each other's skins".[44]

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[41] Jolly, *Sisterhood and After*; Thomlinson, *Race and Ethnicity in the Women's Movement in England*

[42] Mulvey and Alexander's partners, Peter Wollen and Gareth Stedman Jones, published a number of pieces in *7 Days* in the early 1970s explicitly in support of women's liberation and especially the History Group's Freudian-Althusserian project.

[43] Juliet Mitchell, "Theory as Object", *October*, Vol. 113 (2005), p. 36.

[44] Delmar in Mary Kelly, "Conversation on 'On the passage of a few people through a rather brief period of time" p. 4. See also the contributions in that paper by Mary Kelly, p. 1, Laura Mulvey, p. 3, Sally Alexander, pp. 5-6.

Study groups such as these were a marked feature of the Women's Movement in London, designed to develop a language with which to theorise women's oppression, a focused counterpart to exploratory consciousness-raising groups.[45] Delmar, Mitchell, and Magaš had all already been explicit about the need for a theory that illuminated "the changing, concrete conditions of oppression, exploitation, and conflict".[46] In this sense, theory was a central part of activism, as, in the absence of one, women's tactics and political organisation would flounder. The search for theory, in turn, shaped the focus of the History Group: an interrogation of whether "there had been historically, or continued to be socially, an identifiable 'fall from grace' on which women's oppression had been founded and had continued to be perpetuated".[47] This was the primary question for early socialist feminism, as the 'origins' promised to illustrate the extent to which the rise of women's oppression was determined by capitalism.[48] Mitchell, of course, was already sceptical of any search for mythical origins, and it is clear from the texts that the Group read – Engels, Marx, Eleanor Marx, Edward Aveling, Lévi-Strauss, Freud – that their discussions were directed at the workings of oppression more than it's linear history. The articles the group edited for the WLM magazine *Shrew* evidenced this focus as well, breaking from previous issues of the magazine by combining political reportage with theoretical analysis on women's situation in different national liberation and women's liberation movements globally. This emphasis on the diversity of women's situation also indicates a deep sympathy with

[45] *Shrew*, Feb-march 1970, p. 2: Irene Fick, "On Theoretical Base Groups", *Shrew* January (1970), p. 23. Sue O'Sullivan dates a further expansion of such groups to 1972, Sue O'Sullivan, "Passionate Beginnings: Ideological Politics 1969-72", *Feminist Review*, No. 11, Sexuality (Summer, 1982), p. 84.

[46] Mitchell, "Untitled speech transcript" delivered at a conference on "women and socialism", in Box: Talk Transcripts and Interviews (Including Published Copies), JM Archive, University of Essex, pp. 2-3. Emphasis in original. Branka Magas, "Sex Politics/Class Politics", *New Left Review*, no. 66, March/April (1971),

[47] Laura Mulvey in Mary Kelly, "Conversation on 'On the passage of a few people through a rather brief period of time" p. 2. She uses almost the identical words in Laura Mulvey, "Introduction to the Second Edition", *Visual and Other Pleasures*, (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. xv

[48] Sheila Rowbotham's Arsenal women's group was also reading deeply in anthropology, to understand how universal oppression was. See Sheila Rowbotham, C1420 *Sisterhood and After: the Women's Liberation Oral History Project* p. 78. Laura Mulvey in Mary Kelly, "Conversation on 'On the passage of a few people through a rather brief period of time" p. 2; Sally Alexander C1420 *Sisterhood and After*

Mitchell's earlier scepticism of a unified collective of 'women'. As Delmar and Mitchell wrote together, only a theory specific to women's oppression could explain "what and where women are".[49] The final key to their emphasis on theory, and their querying of women, was the distinct emphasis the History Group placed on 'consciousness'. Like the second New Left, the Group's articles on Miss World, the nature of women's liberation and national liberation, and the limits of the women's movement abroad all defined women's consciousness as a product of power relations that masked oppression, not as a force for unity. The "painful awareness that we as women are all oppressed and accept our oppression", as Margaret Walters described, was the starting point for their analysis and the point upon which their interpretation, of society, of the family, of national and women's liberation, and of Freud, began.

Mitchell published her first piece on Freud in that issue of *Shrew*, entitled "Why Freud?", and many of the Group's collective concerns echoed in her analysis. Mitchell had entered the British Museum at the beginning of the summer of 1970 with the intent to read five articles by Freud, she emerged two months later having read his entire works. Her article represented some of the wonder engendered by that experience, and bore the marks of an early attempt to process the information. She began by acknowledging the concerns and criticisms made by the Women's Movement about Freud and granted that stereotypes and prejudice lay latent in his scientific analysis. Despite this, she argued that Freud was asking the questions central to the WLM on the nature of womanhood. The Oedipus complex in particular could explain how "the infant with specific male or female sex organs, yet retaining a bisexual disposition (could develop that is, with the social-sexual characteristics of either sex), nevertheless becomes socialized (or

[49] Rosalind Delmar, Juliet Mitchell. "Women's Liberation in Britain" first published in *Leviathan* no. 38 reprinted in *Goodbye to All that*, 13 Oct 1970, p. 8, *Women's Studies Archive*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/VTMZEQ745951923/WMNS?u=combiau&sid=WMNS&xid=605fa035 [Accessed 28 Jan 2020]

humanized), according to one possibility, the one that it is felt corresponds with its anatomy".[50] This reading of the Oedipus Complex, then, combined the anti-psychiatric accounts of 'socialisation' with the scientific systemisation of Marxism. In her interpretation, Mitchell was once against indebted to Althusser, whose defence of psychoanalysis, "Freud and Lacan", had been translated in 1969.[51] Althusser, too, had found the Oedipus Complex to be necessary for a Marxist account of the capitalist subject. He described the Complex, in terms Mitchell echoed, as the moment in which a social "Law of Order" transformed "mammiferous larvae into human children, *masculine* or *feminine subjects*".[52] Mitchell sought to extend this account of the Marxist subject into an analysis of the different effects social norms had upon boys and upon girls. She sought to explain why the moment in which the child becomes a girl was the moment they also became inferior. She was hampered, however, by the symmetry of Althusser's account: the boy loves the mother, the girl the father, both fear castration for their incestuous desires. She declared herself tentative, writing her account "presupposes two things: 1) a fundamental heterosexual urge that makes one sex want the other sex and 2) that the penis is the most valued of all".[53] The old silence about gender inequality that had afflicted the feminist adaptation of Marxism and of anti-psychiatry continued, at first, into psychoanalysis.

The History Group's turn to psychoanalysis affirmed their existing concerns with sexuality, oppression, consciousness, and 'women' while also shifting the scale of their analysis. "Our subsequent encounter with Freud", Mulvey remembers, directed the Group toward "the endlessly repeated inscription of women's subordination within a patriarchal social system".[54] This change

[50] Mitchell, "Why Freud*?*" P. 24
[51] Althusser, "Freud and Lacan", *New Left Review* (1969) Vol. 55, p. 55
[52]Althusser, "Freud and Lacan", p. 57. Emphasis in original.
[53] Juliet Mitchell, "Why Freud?", p. **?.**
[54] Laura Mulvey, "Introduction to the Second Edition", *Visual and Other Pleasures*, (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. xv

in the 'moment' of women's subordination, from a moment in history to a structure in one's life, had a number of important effects on the theories of the History Group. The first is that it focused on women in the context of the family. It also pushed them, as Mitchell had in "Women: the Longest Revolution", to examine the social system as a whole. In turn, the subject of study was not so much the individual, but on the ways that the individual, as a man or woman, reinforced social norms and structures.

This focus, which might be characterised as a focus on social norms rather than individual experiences of those norms, was already present in a number of the articles in History *Shrew*, most notably in the summary of group discussions about the relationship between 'women's liberation' and 'national liberation'. Though the Group acknowledged that colonial oppression and women's oppression often intersected, and they also acknowledged that women of colour were, by extension, under a 'double oppression', the discussion still affirmed that the focus for women's liberation should be on women's oppression alone. This was because they viewed women's oppression as a distinct structure underpinned by norms, functions, and roles common to women, because those same norms created women alike. The History Group's focus on the "production of typicality, of 'ideality'", as Mitchell later call it, meant that the exclusion of difference was actually inherent to their theory, just as it seemed inherent to the ideology that they studied.[55] The point was to move from the diversity of experience up to the mechanisms that governed it, including the psyche under psychoanalysis and by extension the family under capitalism.

This focus on the mechanisms of oppression dovetailed with understanding that ideology and consciousness were a form of control that connected the 'base' and the 'superstructure'.

[55] Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p.

Through psychoanalysis, Mitchell and her peers in the History Group began to distinguish between two forms of ideology. The first was the notion of mystification, already central to Mitchell's analysis in "Women: the Longest Revolution". The second, akin to the focus on women's consciousness, was 'the way we lived ourselves as men and women'. Here, the point was not so much that women ignored their 'realities' as the fact that their realities were constituted by ideology. The notion of 'woman' thus became an ideology, neither true nor false but how 'women' lived. This moved beyond ideology as mere obfuscation, as in Mitchell's 'bourgeois ideology' of 1966, to offer it, and by extension 'woman', a central role in sustaining or transforming social and economic relations. It was a febrile and flexible approach to study, one that took in a variety of issues and encompassed both 'socialist' and new 'radical' feminist approaches, focused on both the relationship of women to capitalism and of women to men.

III – PSYCHOANALYTIC FAMILIES

Still, though psychoanalysis could explain how children become sexed within the family, it did not explain how this process was, in turn, related to capitalism. The problem of the relation of the private sphere to production remained perhaps the most pressing concern of socialist feminism and Mitchell grappled with its implications in *Woman's Estate*, a slender book published by Pantheon in 1971.[56] The book was built around "Woman: The Longest Revolution", and bookended it, first, with an analysis and explanation of the major tendencies of the Women's Movement and, second, with an analysis of the revolutionary conditions of women's liberation. It was the latter, an analysis of the family and psychoanalysis, that demonstrated where Mitchell, and the Movement, was headed. She argued that the current nuclear family was the ideological legacy of shifts inaugurated with the advent of modern

[56] Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate* (London, Brooklyn: Verso, 2015 [1971]).

capitalism. Faced with the decay of old social structures and the decline of ownership of production at the beginning of industrialisation, the nuclear family had been extended to the proletariat as a promise of continued private ownership. The echo of Engels in Mitchell's account was substantially modified by Althusser's two notions of ideology. The first, as in "Woman: the Longest Revolution", cast the family as a mystification that obscured ongoing changes and ensured continued social production. To explain women's position within it, Mitchell pared this with the new understanding, drawn from Althusser and endorsed by her turn to Freud, of ideology as "how we live ourselves". She claimed that women – in their person as well as their role in the household – embodied this promise of private property and thus ensured the stability of the current system despite its multitude of contradictions. Psychoanalysis thus offered the means to understand how this ideology was reproduced in women, and how it, in turn, reproduced the social and economic order. The dual sense of ideological 'unity' evident in her new account of the family thus put psychoanalysis at the centre of women's oppression and women at the centre of capitalism.

The family therefore offered historical and material specificity for the use of psychoanalysis and the interpretation of the Oedipus complex. The family, therefore, became the midpoint between capitalism and psyche, the structure that connected, and was determined by, each phenomenon. The question of the family and capitalism, and 'reproduction' and 'production' was the most important one for socialist feminism in the early 1970s. Its most famous form was the 'Domestic Labour Debate', which focused on the value of housework to capitalism, and largely concerned whether this value be conceived in social or economic terms. Though Mitchell and much of the History Group felt these questions misguided on Marxist and, increasingly, feminist grounds, their understandings of the division of the sexes were increasingly provoked,

and refined, in response to these debates, especially the controversial Wages for Housework lobby and its forceful spokeswoman Selma James.[57] In the guise of the Family Group and the Political Economy of Women Group, which contained many of its members, Delmar, Magas, Alexander, Davin, Kelly, and others, turned increasingly to the history of the family in early industrial revolution. Though their arguments differed in important ways, they shared a common concern with how women's functions in the home and production had been rearranged by the advent of industrial capitalism and why, under this arrangement, women continued to be inferior.[58] Their explanations, like Mitchell's, concerned the dialectical relationship between women's work and familial ideology in delimiting or propelling change.

One important solution to the impasse of family and capitalism was suggested by the Family Group and expressed in a paper given by Rosalind Delmar at the national conference in 1972. She argued that 'one fruitful way of approaching the problem is to analyse sexism as the structure which dominates in the world of reproduction and capitalism as the structure which dominates the world of production".[59] This 'dual systems' approach, which treated 'sexist' oppression and capitalist exploitation as analogous and intertwined structures, meshed well with the structuralist tendencies of the History Group and of psychoanalysis. The innovation was particularly important for opening two further modes of inquiry. The first shift was in the nature of the contradiction. With sexism now an independent system, the determinant 'contradiction'

[57] C.f. Delmar, "Oppressed Politics", *Spare Rib,* Issue 2 (1972), pp. 8-11. The entire issue is dedicated to a debate about James' arguments.

[58] Branka Magas, "Sex Politics/Class Politics", *New Left Review*, no. 66, March/April (1971), pp. 69-92; Delmar, "Looking Again at Engels's "Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State" and Sally Alexander, "Women's Work in Nineteenth Century London; A Study of the Years 1820-50" in *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (Harmondsworth, 1977), pp. 279-87, 59-111.

[59] Rosalind Delmar, "Sexism, Capitalism and the Family" p. 1 in 7SEB/A/7, Amanda Sebasteyen Papers, LSE: Women's Library, Magas would have dissented from the implications, though perhaps not the terms, of this argument: her conception the family was more materialist than Delmar and Alexander's. See Magas and Robin Blackburn, "Comment on Lucien Rey", *New Left Review* vol. 67 (1971); Coulson, Magas, Wainwright, "The Housewife and her Labour under Capitalism – A critique", *New Left Review*, vol. 89 (1975).

could exist within the conditions of the family and reproduction, rather than production. This contradiction could also be explained with reference to the dynamics inherent to sexism, rather than those produced by the relationship between sexism and capitalism. The second, related, was that Delmar now argued that 'women' as well as 'men', at least 'men' as 'men' rather as workers, were constituted and determined by the family. As Delmar had written the year before, it was the "personality difference between men and women [that] assures the male a privileged position in all forms of social life, quite apart from the privileges that result from a particular form of property".[60] This gave a direct theoretical basis for their use of psychoanalysis, and credence to the oft-noted curiosity that, at work and unionisation campaigns, women still identified first as mothers and wives.[61]. Most importantly, it suggested a socialist means to explain the difference between the sexes. Gender became a relation that was created in the production of 'sex' that specified a relation of control by men over women in private as well as public.[62] Psychoanalysis thus explained more than the creation of 'women' in ideology, but the creation of this difference and of this relationship. In doing so, the family became more than an ideological break upon the revolutionary process, as Mitchell had argued in *Woman's Estate*. Rather, it was a total social institution that in itself produced its own ideological dynamics, dynamics that, in turn, could determine the sphere of production. The personal here was not so much political as the political, as regards the difference between the sexes, was determined by the private.

## IV – PATRIARCHY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

[60] Rosalind Delmar, "What is Feminism" in Michelene Wandor, ed., *The Body Politic: Writings from the Women's Liberation movement in Britain, 1969-1972* (London: Stage 1, 1972), p.
[61] This was particularly apparent in the case of the important campaign to assist with the unionization of Night Cleaners, in which Alexander, Mitchell, and Kelly, among others, were closely involved.
[62] Delmar, "Introduction" in Shulamith Firestone, *Dialectic of Sex* (London: The Women's Press, 1979).

These efforts to reconceive the family in response to the limits of the domestic labour debate shaped Mitchell's own interpretation of psychoanalysis and its utility in understanding women's oppression. It coincided with two important shifts in her own thought: a reconfiguration of 'patriarchy' in place of 'sexism', and her first encounter with Jacques Lacan. Of Lacan, it is important to note his minimal influence on Mitchell's work at this point and his partial influence into *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, given Mitchell is often cast as a 'Lacanian' thinker, usually as a means of critique.[63] Her use of Lacan, limited given only two texts existed in English at this point, was filtered through Althusser's notion of the "Law of Order", itself a meaningful misreading of Lacan's Symbolic. By combining Lacan's "Law of the Father" with Althusser's "Law of Order", Mitchell adopted her own form of Lacanian psychoanalysis to understand the dynamics of the Oedipus complex as one of patriarchy. She explained, shortly after the release of *Woman's Estate*, that patriarchy "does not point to the role of men in general, it specifies the significance of fathers".[64] This was a significant development on radical feminist theories of patriarchy dedicated the power of men over women, most famously that of Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics*. Mitchell had reviewed that book in 1970 and found it wanting, arguing that Millett "*isolates* different mechanisms" but does not explain how these mechanisms of patriarchy "find themselves in different combinations in all specific instances".[65] Through her interpretation of patriarchy and her reading of Lacan, she therefore began to adapt patriarchy into an Althusserian theory, akin to her analysis in "Women: the Longest Revolution".

When psychoanalysis was reconfigured as a description of the role of fathers, the Oedipus complex and the nuclear family became a mechanism by which patriarchy was reproduced and

[63] Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction*
[64] Socialist scholars speech, p. 7. Emphasis in original
[65] Juliet Mitchell, "Sexual Politics: Kate Millett, Reviewed by Juliet Mitchell" *Modern Occasions*, Vol. 1, No. 2 Winter (1971), p. 290. Emphasis in original. She drew here on Althusser's essay "Marxism and Humanism", published in *For Marx* and translated by Brewster in 1969.

historically configured. In doing so, Mitchell literalised Lacan's notion of the 'Phallus', arguing that, just as the father confers on his child a name and a class, the father/Phallus determined the child's sex. The father's 'intervention' in 'his powerful role' became the defining event of the Complex, the moment when the father, representing social order more generally, demanded the end of the mother and child's love. The child thus adopted a sex, and the appropriate sexual desires, not only in response to but in recognition of the father's authority.

This interpretation also marked a significant departure from Mitchell's own critical thoughts on Millett's text and on patriarchy more generally. In her review in 1970, Mitchell had indicated that 'patriarchy', like 'religion', had to be distinguished from economically defined conditions, like 'class' or 'slavery'. The former were part of the superstructure, though they could therefore be in 'contradiction', they could not be 'determinant'. Now, inspired by theories of the dual and independent structures of 'sexism' and 'capitalism', Mitchell argued otherwise. The father embodied a relationship of control, rather than male power, over children and over women. His authority was enforced by class, descent, 'naming', but these material structures were derived from the sexual division set in place by the Oedipus complex. The family thus became a material structure to itself, its organisation in the nuclear family was the 'material base' of patriarchy (just as relations to the mode of production were the material base of capitalism). Equally important was the emphasis Mitchell now placed on social roles. She argued "it doesn't really make all that much difference if you happen to grow up without a father, or in a commune as opposed to a nuclear family, in that the father is always present even if it's only by his absence".[66] In other words, the definitive factor in the equation was not the child's experience of the Oedipus complex, but rather the patriarchal structure that defined the nature of the complex more

[66] Socialist scholars speech, pp. 12-13. Emphasis in original.

generally. The father, in this way, was poised between a direct person and a 'symbolic' embodiment of a larger determinant relation of control.

To reconsider the role of the father in the patriarchal family, and to rethink the nature of the family as ideology and as structure, was also to reconsider the role of the mother. Here, Mitchell was on relatively new ground. As Heidi Hartmann suggested in a famous essay from 1980, though feminism was highly attentive to the emotional and economic effort entailed in domestic labour and child-rearing, the acts were taken as evidence, either, of woman's relation to the economic system in Marxist feminism or, woman's domination by their husband in radical feminism.[67] The woman's role or function in the family, as a family unit, often went unexplored. Mitchell, though she had addressed part of the question in "Women: the Longest Revolution", had sharply distinguished women's role in 'socialisation' from women's maternal capacities. She had also been highly critical of radical feminist accounts, especially Shulamith Firestone, who had explained oppression with relation to male control of female reproduction. But Mitchell's new reading of the Oedipus complex reversed 'innate heterosexuality', where the boy loves the mother and the girl loves the father, by positing that children shared a special, natural bond with the mother into which the patriarch intervened. "The mother has a physical relationship with the infant", she noted in an article for the *New York Times* in 1971, "which is different from that of the father's".[68] In other words, the reconsideration of mother and child within patriarchy, especially when framed against the dominant father's intervention, brought Mitchell to the precise territory that she had formerly avoided: the relationship between biology and women's oppression.

[67] Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union", *Capital & Class,* p. 2
[68] Juliet Mitchell, "What is Woman?: I", *New York Times*, Dec 13, 1971, p. 39.

The major part of this return to early childhood and to women's capacity as mothers was an attempt to surpass the 'cultural conditioning' vs 'biological nature' model that predominated in radical feminist arguments. Mitchell had been critical of the shallow nature of this debate, which she argued lacked an understanding of dialectics and of history.[69] This argument, implicitly, also directed a critical eye toward the anti-psychiatry that had long influenced her understanding of subjectivity, consciousness, and the notion of 'woman'. Her first theorisations of the Oedipus complex, however, had also been an explanation of how such socialisation into sex roles occurred. With her increased focus on the patriarchal society, not on the nuclear family, however, the notion of the child as a 'blank' slate shaped by their direct family circumstances seemed increasingly limited. "A girl is a woman before she is born", she wrote in the *New York Times* piece, pointing to the "customs, conventions, and ideas of our society" that directed the parent's and the society's immediate responses to the baby. Soon, however, even this seemed too narrow. In the annual Mary Stopes Lecture that March 1972, Mitchell argued that the continued oppression of women had to be based on something deeper, more prolonged than 'socialisation'.[70]

Mitchell's consideration of the mother and child relationship, and her focus on the independence of social reproduction and the depths of patriarchy, led her to the unconscious. Given the centrality of the unconscious to her arguments in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* and to the subsequent use of psychoanalysis for feminist theory, it is notable that she had, until this point, lacked any sharp notion of it. Instead, the unconscious has been directly conflated with ideology, as a state of mystification or a lived unawareness. This was, of course, indebted to Althusser's own misreading of psychoanalysis, which he had flagged in the English introduction

[69] Mitchell, *Woman's Estate*, pp. 87-91.
[70] Juliet Mitchell "The Second Marie Stopes Memorial Lecture, Female Sexuality, Juliet Mitchell, Given in the University of York on 13 March 1972" p. 184 in "Box: Talk transcripts 1", JM Archive, University of Essex.

to "Freud and Lacan". It had also been central to the Women's Movement and especially to anti-psychiatry, whose promise of the 'whole self' Mitchell had extended to women's eventual liberation in *Woman's Estate*.[71] The unconscious rendered this 'whole self' and the 'politics of experience' impossible: hence the ferocity of her critique of Laing in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*.

The unconscious proved the way to move beyond a simple configuration of socialisation and, essentially, to claim biology for human culture. It also underpinned her major breakthrough in the early months of 1972 on the nature of the difference between the sexes. In the Mary Stopes Lecture, Mitchell argued that the unconscious was the "the confluence of biology, the historical, and the immediate accidental".[72] She recast the first, the biological contribution to sex, not in terms of genitalia but sexuality and a child's 'active' and 'passive' drives. These, Mitchell explained, were primarily the same for all young children, who assume a sexual relationship of attraction and antimony with the mother who nurses them. By recasting biology in terms of sexual drives, Mitchell's argument progressed existing notions of the difference between the sexes in several ways. The first was close to the arguments of Reich and Laing, and stressed the impact of social attitudes toward children's sexuality. Girls, she suggested, were subject to more inhibition, and thus greater sexual repression. However, and this was Mitchell's second major discovery, the Oedipus process was fundamentally shaped by the relationship between the social and the sexual. In the Oedipal moment, the girl must realise that she is like the mother she loves, and, therefore, that she cannot have the mother or occupy the position of power, the father. In doing so, she, the girl, must stress her 'passive' identification with the mother while the boy merely transposes his 'active' object relation onto other women. "So here begin", Mitchell wrote,

[71] Mitchell, *Woman's Estate*, pp. 14-15.
[72] Juliet Mitchell "The Second Marie Stopes Memorial Lecture", p. 131

"for the first time our associations of passivity with femininity and of activity with masculinity: here begins the way we define the differences between the sexes".[73] This was a crucial step. For one, Mitchell used the unconscious to lodge sexual difference physically: in sexuality and the unconscious. Sexual difference was thus much more than a question of why children 'emulate' their mothers or fathers, but the moment in which the young girl was made passive and feminine, the boy active and masculine. This was not innate, but it was, nevertheless, intractable. Mitchell had also dissociated the various components of 'being a women', and reconstructed them, we might say, as a 'complex structure', comprised of sexuality, sexual orientation, family structure, social norms, and personhood. She had also explained the process by which this occurred, while recognising the depths in which it was lodged. The central part of this argument was the clear distinction between masculine and feminine, and male and female. The former were traits, the latter functions in society. For this reason, the process could also simultaneously explain why the girl was rendered inferior at the moment that she was sexed. Sexual difference, in this analysis, was therefore also a relationship of inferiority and control.

## V – SEXUAL DIFFERENCE AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

*Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, published by Pantheon in early 1974, represented the culmination of Juliet Mitchell's long consideration of the nature of sexual difference and the place of the family and patriarchy within capitalism. The book sought to make sense of "how we might use [psychoanalysis] to help us understand the operations of a patriarchal system that must by definition oppress women".[74] At the centre of this exploration – from her recount of Freud's arguments, to her assessment of existing analyses by Reich and Laing and feminism, and her suggestion of her own theory – was the unconscious. Mitchell argued, like Althusser before her,

[73] Juliet Mitchell "The Second Marie Stopes Memorial Lecture", p. 136.
[74] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. xvii.

that Freud offered a universal science whose laws and mechanisms transcended the particular culture in which it was discovered. She read, and recounted, Freud's entire oeuvre, therefore, in order to understand first the creation of the unconscious in the child and second how this universal process resulted in sexual difference when it took place under a patriarchal system. In doing so, the book offered an explanation of the 'complex structure' of patriarchal society that was grounded in the distinction between men and women. It posited that patriarchy was 'overdetermined', not in its relation to the material base but rather in its relationship to human civilization writ large. She argued that the conditions for revolution thus existed not in the relationship between men and women, but rather in sexual difference itself, as it extended from the individual, the family, and throughout society.

At the centre of Mitchell's final analysis, therefore, was a theory of sexual difference, rather than of the difference between the sexes. It built directly upon her previous distinction between 'ideology' and 'the unconscious', between 'active' and 'passive', and between 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Repression, she explained, was the key dynamic: sexuality was its grounds. When the "multifarious and multitudinous" drive came into contact with "the restraining might of the cultural inhibitions of shame, disgust, morality", the individual responded by repressing both the "thoughts attached to the drive and its denial" into the unconscious.[75] In this process, the individual's desires existed forever in tension with their response to the social prohibition and the prohibition itself. This dynamic was central to the Oedipus complex. Mitchell argued that the young child, born bisexual with 'active' and 'passive' desires, gradually and naturally distinguished itself from the mother. This process of individuation, which Mitchell drew directly from Lacan's "The Mirror-Phase", was sharply exacerbated by the arrival of the 'Phallus' during the castration phase. No longer a penis, nor a simple embodiment of the father, the Phallus

[75] Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 53, 10.

instead represented social norms more generally. With its metaphoric "arrival", the child realises that they cannot have everything, society will either give them a penis or a baby.[76] Because the child also existed in a patriarchal society, this was also the moment in which children realised that some positions and some traits are more powerful than others.

The girl and the boy, in the moment of the Oedipus complex, thus meet their different fates for the first time. The girl, Mitchell writes, "makes the shift from mother-love to father-love only because she has to, and then with pain and protest. She has to, because she is without the phallus. No phallus, no power".[77] The "massive act of repression" that this realisation entailed, dulling active 'masculine' desires in favour of passive 'feminine' ones, had a determinant effect on the female personality, and the female destiny as 'mother'.[78] This moment of the Oedipus complex therefore had two dimensions. In the first, common to civilisation, it resulted in the repression which first absorbed the power of the Phallus and the laws of society into the unconscious. Under patriarchy, however, that same act of repression channelled the child's natural active and passive drives into sexual difference and therefore into alignment with the patriarchal social laws the young girl or boy now unconsciously recognised.

Mitchell's theory of sexual difference was at once a theory of patriarchy and a theory of humanity. It cast the Oedipus complex into a structural moment, rather than a historical or teleological one, which happened simultaneously on the individual, familial, and civilisational level. Her account was thus extremely careful to distinguish between repression, as a general phenomenon, and repression of active and passive drives as a response to the Phallus. It also distinguished between the Phallus, as a symbol of social order, and the Phallus, as a representative of patriarchal father-right. This, she explained was "why the unconscious and with

[76] Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 25
[77] Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism,* p. 26
[78] Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 112.

it the way mankind lives his humanity, is, as Freud says, 'eternal', while at the same time, the accidental individual experiences of the subject and his particular social culture go to make it up".[79]

The challenge for feminism was therefore to create a political theory that could distinguish between the demands of all civilisation and the specific demands of this patriarchal culture. To do so, in her final chapters, Mitchell used the theories of the great French structuralists Lacan and Claude Lévi-Strauss to demonstrate that the "eternal" demands of human society, namely the incest taboo and the Oedipus complex that repeats it, "may have become 'unsuitable' for the particular social form in which it is today expressed".[80] She therefore transposed her concern with women's function within capitalism, evident in "Women: the Longest Revolution" and the definition of 'women' as a functional ideology in "Woman's Estate", onto an analysis of the necessary and subsidiary functions for human civilisation tout court. In *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Mitchell argued that within the nuclear family in late capitalism, the Oedipus complex stressed the very incestuous desires that it, and the incest taboo, sought to mitigate. The contradiction thus lay not, as in Mitchell's earlier work, between material reality and the ideology that disguised it but rather, following the insights of the Family Group about the determinant nature of the family for sexual difference, within the kinship structure itself. Capitalism, she implied, had developed in such a way that was at odds with structural imperatives for society: it had provoked the contradiction, but was not central to it. In this way, the process of creating sexual difference, and with it the inferiority of women, constituted the pre-condition for revolution.

[79] Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 381.
[80] Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 380

*Psychoanalysis and Feminism* offered a radical and new conception of the difference between the sexes and the nature of women's oppression. She argued that the patriarchal creation of men and women was as much psychological as social, and that it demanded the uncomfortable and impossible adaptation of sexuality and history to fit the Patriarchal law that governed society. Mitchell found that sexual difference was comprised not merely of social roles but rather of a dynamic intersection of active and passive desires, representing masculinity and femininity, that existed within every subject. It was replicated in society more generally, and in the patriarchal social structure, for, as Mitchell argued, "*both* sexes repudiate the implications of femininity".[81] Sexual difference could therefore assume a dialectical shape: socialist feminism found its equivalent to Marxist class conflict.

At the heart of this conception was the unconscious – simultaneously a generative notion that allowed for the immense advances of 'sexual difference', and a tense drag on a theory of revolution. Indeed, the unconscious made the final revolutionary argument of *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, which Mitchell would partially begin to retract by the time of that book's release in 1974, seem impossible. This was in part because it oscillated between two notions of the unconscious: the model of difficulty in the theory of sexual difference, which represented the struggle with the social Law, and the unconscious as Althusser's 'ideology', in which the social Law was perpetuated and lived through generations. It was to the latter that Mitchell turned in her prognostications for revolution in the final chapters of *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, suggesting that "Women have to organize themselves as a group to effect a change in the basic ideology of human society[…]a struggle based on a theory of the social non-necessity at this stage of development of the laws instituted by patriarchy".[82] By pinpointing the struggle at the

[81] Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 404.
[82] Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 414.

level of the ideology, not the level of unconscious, Mitchell left women as the revolutionary party in tact but threatened to undermine her own theory on the laws of the unconscious and its power over social reproduction. She privileged, in other words, the tension between the Patriarchal Law and civilisation, rather than the one that she was beginning to forecast elsewhere, between the Law and the impossibility of sexual difference itself.

*Psychoanalysis and Feminism* was the furthest step in the History Group's progression toward a revolutionary theory of sexual difference, but it arose from their shared preoccupations and similar theoretical concerns. It is useful, then, to think about how similar theories emerged in the work of all the women in that Group in the mid-1970s, begun before Mitchell's book was released but then reworked in its terms in the years following. Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", perhaps the most famous piece of feminist film theory, is perhaps the best example of the Group's mutual influence. [83] Mulvey had been experimenting with the use of psychoanalysis in film criticism since the early 1970s, and in a series of reviews for *Spare Rib* she, in parallel to Mitchell, suggested at first that the film 'socialised' like Oedipus and, then, in revision, that the mother-child relationship may represent an alternative form to patriarchy that film could recapture.[84] In "Visual Pleasure", Mulvey coined the now-ubiquitous term 'the male gaze' to refer to the psychoanalytic dynamics of positioning and identification within the cinema. The gaze, Mulvey argued, allocated positions of 'masculine' activity or 'feminine' passivity on three levels simultaneously: between the characters on the screen, the audience and the film, the film and broader social laws. Like Mitchell, Mulvey understood that gaze to be simultaneously sexual and structural, like Mitchell, too, Mulvey argued that the dominant position within a patriarchy was male. To capture the unique allure of Hollywood, cast

[83] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (1975), pp. 6-18.
[84] Mulvey, "Fear Eats the Soul", *Spare Rib*; Mulvey, "The Hole Truth: Laura Mulvey Looks into Penelope Slinger", *Spare Rib*

as a cipher for the social order, Mulvey extended from Mitchell's notions of sexuality into Freudian fantasy and fetish, both of which perverted but endorsed active and passive positions. She thus expanded the notion of sexuality at the expense of the kinship structure, but to ends that reinforced Mitchell's major conceptualisation.

Most importantly, both Mulvey and Mitchell were fundamentally concerned with the normative social laws and structures against which all, children or viewers, were defined. Though they acknowledged the possibility of deviation from those laws, the political project of the History Group was to understand the normative ideal of sexual difference. The assumption, and the subject of study, was how this law, once an ideology, determined the subject's position in the social order. For this reason, the frequent criticism that Mulvey has ignored the multiplicity of subjectivities or 'gazes' is correct, though it misses the political stakes of Mulvey's, and by extension Mitchell's, project. As Jacqueline Rose, their close collaborator, has since written, "the pulse of the cinema" is "who it allows – or rather invites – you to be".[85] The cinema for Mulvey thus functioned in an identical manner to Mitchell's kinship structure. Cinema, family, and subject represented society in miniature: all were governed by the same rules and structured by the same roles. Different individual experiences were thus of secondary import to the Law that marked all in common and that determined sexual difference. The Law, for this reason, that was the central object of study in these feminist accounts of sexual difference for it was the Law that answered both Mitchell's central questions: how does women come to be and why does she come to being oppressed?

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[85] Jacqueline Rose, "A Rumbling of Things Unknown: Jacqueline Rose on Marilyn Monroe", *The London Review of Books,* Vol. 34, No. 8 (2012). This criticism is discussed with great sophistication, and without falling on simple critique of psychoanalysis, in Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: a Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago, 1986) and Laura Lee Downs, "If 'Woman' is Just an Empty Category, Then Why Am I Afraid to Walk Along at Night? Identity Politics and the Post-Modern Subject", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (1993), pp. 431-2.

## CONCLUSION: SEXUAL DIFFERENCE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Juliet Mitchell, in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, provided a theory of sexual difference that opened new queries, and questions, for feminism and for the left. She had set out at first to understand the function of 'woman' in capitalist society. Upon finding that 'woman' were a false imposition of that society, she sought instead to explore the role that women, as a created mystique, might play in that society's perpetuation. She assumed, and as a liberationist thinker needed, the conditions for women's liberation to lie within the position of women. Creation of 'women' thus had to be the lynchpin of a social and economic order. Psychoanalysis offered the mechanism to explain the process, how women became women, as well as the historical context, the family, in which it occurred. The attempt to construct such a psychoanalytic theory of women's revolution therefore wended its way through an understanding of the family. But, by first positing the family as a structure central to capitalism and then as an independent structure interconnected with it, Mitchell ended at a theory that left the family and the material 'base' in question.

Of all the psychoanalytic thinkers connected to the Women's Liberation Movement in this period, Mitchell alone attempted to think the unconscious alongside historical materialism.[86] For if the unconscious pulled Mitchell away from the material base that she had first thought 'determinant in the last instance', it also offered a model of difference between the sexes that resembled the Marxist dialectic. Femininity and masculinity, passive and active, the unconscious and sexuality reinserted conflict and therefore motion and history into sexual difference itself. It also privileged a Marxist relation of 'control' and domination, domination the masculine or the

[86] To mention the most famous: Materialist Feminist Gayle Rubin's theory of the 'sex-gender system' and compulsory sexuality, for example, does not include the unconscious. Neither Nancy Chodorow, who explained through Klein the socialisation of children into gender, nor Luce Irigary, who used Lacan to challenge a hegemonic masculine 'Symbolic', are Marxists.

feminine over its counterpart, which could be analysed at the level of the individual, at the level of society, and at the level of civilisation writ large. Her theory of sexual difference, based on sexuality and the psyche but defined by historical conjunctures and social laws, thus offered a privileged analytic for socialist feminists in Britain and abroad.

As with almost all of Mitchell's major works, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* did not court controversy but nevertheless provoked it, when the heterogeneity of her reading and the rigor of her analysis resulted in a radical challenge to dearly held tenants and methods. The book caused a minor uproar in Britain when it was first released, and most argued against the adoption of a psychoanalytic theory of sexual difference that rendered political and psychic change more intractable than ever before. Those who were truly sceptical, like Sue Aspinall in *Spare Rib* or Richard Wollheim in *New Left Review*, suggested that Freud had not in fact opened a new theory of sexual difference at all, but posited an essential difference between men and women that originated in the psyche.[87] More common, though, was acknowledgement that Mitchell's analysis left the problem of women's oppression even more entrenched than before. "Psychoanalysis", Margot Waddell feared, "does not in itself invite us to change any of the structures which it so incisively analyses".[88] The reviews therefore focused primarily on Mitchell's final section, and they doubted, to some extent rightly, the complex lengths to which Mitchell went to foresee the end of a patriarchal society.[89] In this, the socialist feminists, including those who saw a potential value in psychoanalysis, were deeply troubled by Mitchell's minimization of the material, especially her definition of the 'family' as a purely ideological

[87] Sue Aspinall, "Another View of Psychoanalysis and Feminism", *Spare Rib*, Issue 24 (1974), p. 42; Wollheim, "Psychoanalysis and Feminism", *New Left Review*
[88] Margot Waddell, "Psychoanalysis and Women", *Spare Rib*, vol. 36 June (1975), p. 39.
[89] Sherry B Ortner, "Oedipal Father, Mother's Brother, and the Penis: A Review of Juliet Mitchell's '*Psychoanalysis and Feminism*'", *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1975), p. 167-182; Elizabeth long, "Juliet Mitchell, 'Psychoanalysis and Feminism'", *Telos*, Issue 20, Summer (1974) pp. 183-189.

structure.[90] Here, the sympathisers implicitly echoed the sceptics, for where they saw 'ideology', Mitchell saw 'the unconscious'.

For those in Mitchell's closest circle, though, the book was a revelation. As Sally Alexander wrote to her friend, Sheila Rowbotham, shortly after reading it, "It feels strange when you read something which articulates and organises ideas which have been floating around in an incoherent and erratic way inside lots of heads and discussed in lots of groups".[91] Members of the History Group wrote many of the major responses to the critiques circulating in the *New Left Review, Red Rag,* and *Spare Rib*. They emphasised the importance of the unconscious, and especially the difficulty of sexual difference. Ros Coward, Rosalind Delmar, and Margaret Walters argued, in near identical terms, that subjectivity and the unconscious was "precarious", that it was "partial". In doing so, they carried Mitchell's arguments about sexual difference, rather than about ideology, through to a new conclusion. To them, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* was a book that indicated the instability of social positions as men and women. The unconscious itself offered a means by which the social order could come undone. Psychoanalysis, in thus sense, offered a science not of the reproduction of the social order but of its permanent instability. Mitchell herself also moved in this direction, and she had planned a new study, never completed, on the relationship between femininity and hysteria in society. The general focus of psychoanalytic feminism in the late 1970s and through the 1980s, to follow the title of Jacqueline Rose's much publicised defence of Mitchell from 1983, was on "femininity and its discontents".

There were many reasons for this shift – the late rise of radical feminism in Britain and its stricter delineation of 'male' and 'female', the influential new translations of "French feminism"

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[90] Molyneux, "Beyond the Domestic Labour Debate", *New Left Review,* vol. 116 (1976); Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism", pp. 8-9; Michele Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: the Marxist/Feminist Encounter;*

[91] Sally Alexander to Sheila Rowbotham, [undated], 7SHRA/A/3/1, Sheila Rowbotham Papers, LSE: Women's Library.

and especially of Lacan, to which Mitchell and Rose contributed a volume in 1982, a declining interest in 'ideology' that was exacerbated by Althusser's notorious murder of his wife in 1980**,** a growing recognition of the nature of individual differences and of long-standing black feminist theories, and eventually the search for a new political strategy with the rise of the far right and Thatcher. But what is equally important is how much of Mitchell's first account of sexual difference remained unchanged. The axes of active and passive, the relationship between the individual and the social order, the primacy of sexual difference within 'humanization', and an emphasis on the body as well as the psyche all remained crucial. Sexual difference was still a structural principle, it shaped social relations writ large as well as an individual's response to society. The social law, in this sense, remained the structuring principle that determined one's position in the social order, only now its variegated and unintended effects were the subject of investigation.

Most important is the ways this concern over sexual difference shaped the seminal works members of the History and the Family Group made in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Mulvey's film *Riddles of the Sphinx*, made with her husband Peter Wollen, and Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* attempted to diagram the Oedipal moment in relation to the child's coming into being through language. Their experimental methods and materials - Kelly's neatly framed soiled nappies shocked the British dailies –sought to render the unconscious visible through evidence of the ways it fragmented social reality and sexual identity. Sally Alexander, too, emerged as a strong proponent of psychoanalysis in the study of history, writing in a famous essay from 1984 that "Subjectivity and sexual identity are always achieved with difficulty and the achievement is always precarious".[92] Others in the History Workshop as well as the Feminist History Group

[92] Sally Alexander, "Women, Class and Sexual Differences in the 1830s and 1840s: Some Reflections on the Writing of a Feminist History" History Workshop, No. 17 (1984);

have made fruitful use of psychoanalytic sexual difference in order to understand the instability wrested by liminal social groups, like witches and séances, or the uncertainty of periods such as interwar Britain, in which femininity seemed dislodged from domesticity.[93] By transposing psychoanalysis and attendant divisions of femininity and masculinity onto the social order writ large, all of these works followed Mitchell in using sexuality and sexual difference to align the individual, the psychic and the social. These women also sat at the heart of some of the major intellectual institutions in Britain in the 1980s – from *Screen,* to *m/f*, to *History Workshop Journal*, to the Institute of Contemporary Arts – and they made sure that a growing general interest in social theory and in language had, as one of its central components, the question of sexual difference and the unconscious.

This is not to suggest that Mitchell's thought has defined the work that came later or even that her development is indicative of the general challenge of the Women's Liberation Movement. Indeed, what is striking about Mitchell is that her work so consistently anticipated the major feminist debates that followed, sometimes even years later. Instead, this article has argued that Mitchell's account of women's oppression in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* transformed psychoanalysis into a theory of sexual difference that opened new paths of inquiry for theorists and artists who worked in her wake. Psychoanalysis was, in some ways, uniquely suited to this pursuit, for the difference between the sexes was central to its conception. However Mitchell, by focusing on conflict and on social structure, rewrote psychoanalysis in ways that simultaneously suited the needs of socialist feminism while also rerouting them. Though Mitchell was thus largely faithful to the major tenants of Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis,

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[93] Lyndal Roper, "Witchcraft and Fantasy in Early Modern Germany", *history workshop,* no. 32 (1991), pp. 19-43; Alex Owen, "The other voice: women, children and nineteenth-century spiritualism" in *Language, gender, childhood* 1985; Rosalind Coward, *Patriarchal Precedents: Sexuality and Social Relations* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983); Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991).

she still used these theories to her own ends. As she herself once said, "Giant theorists such as these impinge on us with their method, not in the narrow sense of methodology, but in their way of approaching the question".[94] Juliet Mitchell, through her interpretation of psychoanalysis and her theory of sexual difference, offered British feminists a powerful new way of approaching the question, one that made the difference between men and women not an effect but a challenge in and of itself.

[94] Sunit Singh, "Emancipation in the heart of darkness: An interview with Juliet Mitchell", *The Platypus Review*, Vol. 38, August (2011), p. 2.