Dear all,

Thank you for reading my long paper on Juliet Mitchell and British feminism. This paper is not related to my dissertation, but instead comes partly from a seminar paper (now much revised) that I wrote for an intellectual history class in 2017 on "Time and Power". I would like to prepare it for submission to a journal by around the end of the year, and so I would like to sharpen my argument and tighten my explanation, and slim the whole paper down. As with many early drafts, I repeat myself quite often as I explained my argument to myself: if you could flag anywhere where this explicit signposting felt necessary, and where it was redundant, that would be extremely helpful. I feel like there are a lot of loose ends throughout the paper, and I am interested to see which are glaring and which go by unnoticed. I would also like to clarify my intervention into 'British history', as opposed to the more methodological intervention I propose at the beginning, and to further specify what is distinctly British about this form of psychoanalytic feminism, any help here would be greatly appreciated.

I feel I should follow Emily's protocol for long papers and help to guide your reading (and the parts to skip according to your interests): the first section (p. 5 to 16) is on the British New Left, the second (p. 16-30) on new feminist thought and theories, the third (p. 30-45) on Mitchell's gradual application of psychoanalysis, and the fourth (45-66) on *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* itself.

This is very drafty so please do not circulate or cite. I apologise for the partial footnotes, I am away from my books and thus could not always double check page numbers and, to make things easier for myself, left them blank to cross-check when I return (this is especially evident in my references to *Women's Estate*, I've been using an e-book while I am away, but it's differently paginated to the hard copy that I took most of the notes from, and so for the sake of consistency, anything from the ebook is blank).

Thank you again, I really appreciate it
Roslyn

In the Mind of the Patriarchy: Juliet Mitchell, Sexual Difference, and the Turn to Psychoanalysis in British Second-Wave Feminism

In recent accounts of the 'turns' that marked the historical discipline over the past thirty years, second-wave feminism looms large. The turn to post-structural, cultural, and linguistic history, celebrated by some and bemoaned by others, is attributed partially or even largely to women who began by questioning the truth of the biological body and continued by questioning the truth of the material and then truth itself.[1] The emphasis is surprising, given the marginal place of second-wave feminist thought in the intellectual histories of the twentieth century and the novelty of a movement that, by definition, took as its subject and was written by an excluded population contributing so markedly to the transformation of an entire field. If the founding presumptions of second-wave feminism thus marked such a radical challenge to existing orthodoxy, what were they, how did they come to be, and how did they eventually make such an impact?

Recent histories of second-wave feminism have focused on the heterodox nature of feminist politics in the 1970s, demonstrating that the plurality of feminisms that seemed abundantly evident in the 1980s existed at least since the movement's advent in socialist, radical, revolutionary, culturalist wings.[2] Though these factions were defined by their intellectual and political programs, we know little about how their foundational theories and assumptions came to be. Many of the ideas, as historians have begun to show, were inherited, a

[1] William Sewell, *Logics of History*: Social Theory and Social Transformation (Chicago: University of Chicago
[2] The classic account is Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad': Radical Feminism in America, 1967-75* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). On Britain 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.

reflection of existing debates or cultural preoccupations with the family, with decolonization, with cultural materialism, with ethics, with structures.[3] These accounts, like histories of the linguistic turn that finally attribute feminism its due, help feminist thought pass into the broader course of history. They do so, however, by explaining how feminism was psychoanalytic or post-colonial, ethical or cultural, rather than showing how feminism may have existed in tension with these existing disciplines, even as it worked within them. Folding second-wave feminism into these longer trajectories can elide how novel, and difficult to conceive, feminist concepts like 'oppression', 'patriarchy', and 'gender' were.

The questions posed by an intellectual history of second-wave feminism therefore speak to many of the most important methodological concerns of intellectual and especially conceptual history: of texts and their contexts, and of canons and their transmission. What did it mean to take a pre-existing theory like Marxism, anti-colonialism, or psychoanalysis and then use it to construct a theory of women's oppression? How did these grand theories change when gender, a concept marginal to the original explanatory framework, was dragged to the centre? Which of the terms of those theories remained the same, which could and did change? Second-wave feminist thinkers enacted a sort of heroic translation that enriched, reshaped, and also reinforced existing canons and hegemonic concepts. Understanding this dual process can thus help us understand the challenge posed by second-wave feminism, and its mark upon academic and public thought.

[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.*

Here, I propose a new intellectual history of second-wave feminism through a history of Juliet Mitchell, one of the most prominent and internationally recognised second-wave feminists, and her turn to psychoanalysis in the 1970s and 1980s. Mitchell and her circle, 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, transformed the Anglo-American feminist and leftist orthodoxy around Freud in the 1970s. Responding to the famous attacks on the leading man of psychoanalysis in works such as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex,* Shulamith Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex* and Ann Koedt's "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm", Mitchell famously argued that "psychoanalysis is not a recommendation *for* a patriarchal society, but an analysis *of* one".[4] That book, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, was a landmark challenge that meant that, after its publication in 1973, feminist theorists of all proclivities had to grapple with and confront psychoanalysis and Mitchell's theorisations. Judith Butler, Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak, Simone de Beauvoir, Antoinette Fouque, Luisa Passerini as well as those outside the movement from Gareth Stedman-Jones to Martin Jay, have all cited it as a crucial catalyst for their own *rapprochement*, both favourable and unfavourable, with psychoanalysis.

It is not just her influence that makes Mitchell an ideal subject for an intellectual history of feminism, but also her connections and the depth, breadth, and length of her writing on the topic of women. She published her first paper on the subject in the *New Left Review*, on which she sat on the editorial board, in 1966 and in the years after travelled frequently to the US and to Paris, associating with the American radical feminists and the French philosophical ones.[5] She ran what is now called the first women's studies class in England in 1968, helped to found

[4] Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, xv.
[5] That reference to her being thrown out of the bed, to Antoinette Fouque, to the intro of PA+F

the coordinating body for second-wave feminism in London, and was on the organization committee for the famous Ruskin conference in 1970, which is often taken as the start of the Movement in England. All the while, she spoke and wrote, one of the few able to make a living from feminist theory. Mitchell was connected to the left, to foreign movements, and to the political infrastructure of women's liberation, or what little infrastructure there was. She drew on insights from of them as she gradually thought through the ideas that became *Psychoanalysis and Feminism.* Her theory of sexual difference laid out in that book, somewhat forgotten after Juliet Mitchell became an analyst in the early 1980s and stopped publishing for almost a decade, was a crucial point of engagement and divergence for later feminist thinkers on questions of gender, power, and subjectivity. It is this theory that has been definitive for an intellectual strand of British feminism in literary and film theory, cultural studies, and history, and that formed the foundation for British feminist thought and the shapes sites of British feminism's so-called post-structural impetus.

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"I guess I'll write about women then", Juliet Mitchell told the stunned editorial board of the *New Left Review*. It was in the middle of the 1960s and the board, assembled just a few years earlier under Perry Anderson, had been talking topics for future issues on the Marxist analysis of undertheorized groups. Amidst a cavalcade of post-colonial conflicts – Algeria, Rhodesia, Zanzibar, Cuba, Malaysia – Mitchell's choice as the only woman on the board provoked surprise and scorn. The resulting essay, "Women: the Longest Revolution" published in 1966, was the first extended piece on gender published within the journal.[6] It took direct aim at the

[6] Two small notes by the editorial board on women's wages and the female vote were published in 1964, the latter of which Swindells and Jardine speculate was written by Mitchell. Both topics were chapters in her uncompleted book on the position of women in England. See Julia Swindells, Lisa Jardine, *What's Left? Women in Culture and the Labour Movement* (London, New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 157-8, fn 4.

Left itself and sought to explain why, contrary to the beliefs of her fellow board members, 'women' were indeed a subject and a Marxist one at that. Written just before the beginning of the organized Women's Liberation Movement in Britain, and later widely circulated in Britain and the United States and translated into French, German, and Italian, "Women: the Longest Revolution" marked the advent of Mitchell's tenure as one of the most prominent theorists of feminism in the West and the first articulation of the issues to which she would devote her career.

Mitchell was born in 1940 in New Zealand, the daughter of an English botanist trapped in the antipodes by the outbreak of war. With a Canadian scientist for a father, known only by his letters and never by his person, and a ramshackle North London home with Labour activists downstairs and anarchists above, Mitchell's childhood was exceptional. Her mother was the family breadwinner even after she remarried, more likely to attend Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament Marches than to be 'angel in the house'.[7] She sent Mitchell to the independent, experimental, and most importantly, co-educational King Alfred School for the entirety of her schooling, where Mitchell matriculated in a tiny student population with future New Left peer Raphael Samuel and read for the first time Marx and the historians at *Past & Present*.[8] She went on to read English at St Anne's College in Oxford from 1958. It was there, at Oxford, where the comparatively miniscule and highly segregated female population was a sharp shock after the 'all-abilities' gender-neutral approach of King Alfred, that Mitchell first began to

[7] On the basis of oral histories with a number of second-wave feminists, Bruley has argued that many of them became involved in the Women's Liberation Movement either because they were inspired by an activist mother or rejected a domestic one. Mitchell clearly falls into the category of the latter. Sue Bruley, " 'It didn't just come out of nowhere did it?': the origins of the women's liberation movement in 1960s Britain", *Oral History*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (2017), pp. 67-78.

[8] Both Samuels and Mitchell cited Marxist historian John Handford as a key inspiration in their early education and intellectual formation. See Ron Brooks, "In a World Set Apart: the Dalton Dynasty at King Alfred School, 1920-62", *History of Education*, vol. 27, no. 4 (1998), pp. 421-440, esp. 438.

notice and to write about women.[9] After an abortive year as a post-graduate at Oxford, she found work as a lecturer in English literature at Leeds in 1961 and began a book on the condition of women in England. Not long thereafter, she relocated again to Reading University in order to be closer to London, to her new husband, and to the *New Left Review*.[10]

Selections from that book on women, eventually lost on a holiday in Genoa, and from a DPhil at Reading on childhood and growing up in the modern British novel, also later abandoned, reveal the connections that Mitchell was beginning to make at the beginning of the 1960s between forms of social organization, education, and gender. Her primary preoccupation was with the disjuncture between supposedly self-evident facts and the material reality that lay beneath them. An early critique of William Golding published in 1962 derided the "widespread mystification" of his work, and took aim at the tension between his obfuscatory prose and his simplistic "absolutes" of 'good' and 'evil', 'innocence' and 'experience' that his characters, often children, learn to choose.[11] A longer discussion of women's education, taken from the lost book and published in 1964, similarly began by pointing to "classically reactionary banalities" of educationist Sir John Newsom, who claimed that women should be educated with regards to their domestic role. These "banalities", she argued, disguised the actual function of women, which was to serve as a form of surplus labour in a time of present shortages and future automation.[12] In both of these essays, Mitchell was concerned with two primary themes: modes

[9] 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. She has said that she read *The Second Sex* at Oxford for the first time: the bookseller thought she was buying pornography. Juliet Mitchell, "Looking back at *Woman's Estate" Verso* 3 February 2015 https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1836-juliet-mitchell-looking-back-at-woman-s-estate [accessed: 29 Jan 2020].

[10] 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

[11] Juliet Mitchell, "Concepts and Techniques in William Golding", *New Left Review*, Vol. 1, No. 15, May/June (1962), pp. 63-71, quote 63.

[12] Juliet Mitchell, "Women's Education", *New Left Review*, Vol. 1, No. 28 Nov/Dec (1964), pp. 72-4.

of learning, whether through experience or schooling, and forms of 'cultural mystification', namely the uncritical adulation of Golding's work and the "antediluvian prejudices" around women's domesticity and women's education. Her tentative combination of education with mystification suggested how she thought the latter functioned.

This interest in 'mystification' and its attendant critique of orthodoxy carried into 'Women: the Longest Revolution", which Mitchell began with a discussion of why women had not really been written about at all. Proceeding from Fourier through Marx, Engels, Babel, and de Beauvoir, she argued that the question of women's oppression had been posed within the Marxist canon but remained resolved, with the 'position of women' either a 'symbol' of the stage of capitalist development, as in Fourier and early Marx, or subsumed in the later work of Marx and Engels under an analysis of the emergence of the bourgeois family. Mitchell contended that the problem with both these formulations was that they failed to explain the particular nature of women's position, both within the family and under capitalism, and how this position had varied over time. In doing so, she claimed the Marxists had reproduced the two 'mystifications' central to women's oppression: first, a belief that inequality was biologically derived, whether physical capacity or reproductive constitution, and second that the family was a coherent unit unto itself, rather than an aggregation of different social functions that could, and did, transform.[13]

Proceeding from the presumption that biology was not destiny, Mitchell was openly drawing upon the two most important feminist ideas of the post-war period: that woman were made, not born, and that middle-class motherhood was a mystique of modern advent.[14] But these were assumptions from which her analysis proceeded, rather than the conclusions

[13] Juliet Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution", *New Left Review*, No. 40 (1966), pp. 12-16.
[14] Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974 [1952]), Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin, 2010 [1963]).

reached. Given that the position of woman was made in history and in society, she wanted to know the conditions under which change could occur. To do so, she extended her earlier preoccupation with the disjuncture between mystification and reality to explain, instead, how multiple mystifications around women and the family conjoined together in order to simulate an unbroken whole. Woman's situation, Mitchell wrote, "must be seen as a *specific* structure", by which she meant a structure specific to a certain historical moment, "which is a unity of different elements".[15] She explained that each "element" moved according to its own logic, each individual "element" could thus break between 'ideal' and 'fact'. It was the relationships between these elements that produced the overall mystification and obscured reality. The task, therefore, was to identify the elements and analyse how they hung together "as a specific structure" within a specific historical moment. Mitchell identified four primary "elements", roughly deduced from women's four primary functions, that constituted women's place in society: production, reproduction, sexuality, and the socialisation of children.

In analytical approach, and in argument, "Women: the Longest Revolution" was fundamentally indebted to Louis Althusser, whose radical reformulation of Marxism would dominate the British New Left, and British socialist feminism, from the mid-1960s until the early 1980s. In this particular essay, Mitchell drew upon Althusser's "Contradiction and Overdetermination", only just published in 1962, collected in *Pour Marx* in 1965, and first translated into English by the *New Left Review* in the 1967 issue following directly after "Women: the Longest Revolution".[16] The two fundamental claims of that essay – that "the contradiction between Capital and Labour is never simple but always specified by the

[15] "Women: the Longest Revolution", p. 16. Emphasis in original.
[16] 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.

historically concrete forms and circumstances in which it is exercised" and that "history 'blazes its trail' through the multiform world of the superstructure, from local tradition to international circumstances" – gave Mitchell the terms and the approach to analyse the question of women, and to specify and distinguish its relation to the movement of capital.[17]

Following Althusser's claim that "history blazes" through the superstructure, Mitchell thus told in miniature the history of the four individual elements that she had selected. It was a history driven by the contradiction between 'mystification' and reality and centred on the family. She quickly dismissed "production", the central category of Marxist analysis, drawing on recent sociology to argue that women's participation in the labour market had remained largely unchanged in recent years and was even on the decline. Reproduction she concluded was also, at this moment, not historically primed. The ideology of the bourgeois family had intensified in response to the potential challenges posed by contraception, with rising birthrates and descending marital ages leaving women's role in "reproduction" equally strong. This same familial ideology, endorsed by new work by Bowlby on the 'psycho-dynamic' nature of parenthood, had reinforced the central place of women in the "socialisation of children", suppressing contradiction and minimizing historical change in that particular "element". But in "sexuality", Mitchell espied a radical transformation. She argued that the shift in recent capitalism from "production-and-work" to "consumption-and-fun" had driven the increased frequency of pre-marital sex, divorce, and remarriage and thus demonstrated that the "dominant sexual ideology" of the monogamous bourgeois family "is proving less and less successful in regulating spontaneous behaviour".[18] This disjuncture between sexual expectations and practice had unsheathed the unity of the 'family ideology' and therefore weakened the entire structure of

[17] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination", p. 27, 32.
[18] Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution", p. 32.

women's oppression that this ideology glossed. Revolutionary conditions thus primed, women's entry into the sphere of production and their final liberation (which following Althusser would occur, of course, in the last instance, through the economic base) was nigh.

By drawing so heavily on Althusser, Mitchell marked herself a clear member of the 'second' New Left, which had, since 1963 when her husband Perry Anderson assumed editorship and ownership of the *Review*, drawn an ever-sharper line between itself and the 'first' New Left. Where the 'first New Left', comprised of Marxist historians like EP Thompson, Raphael Samuel, Raymond Williams, and Stuart Hall, had been concerned with constructing an English tradition of Marxism and history, the second New Left was turned toward Continental Europe and theory with a capital T.[19] The defining event for members of this second New Left was not the invasion of Hungary or revelations of Stalin's atrocities, but decolonisation in the Third World, which made general revolution seemed potent or at least portentous. Reflecting upon these post-colonial conflicts, and especially the Chinese Cultural Revolution, they were driven to reconsider key terms within Marxism, especially class, 'hegemony', and ideology.[20] These new reflections, to the heated dismay of many of the first New Left, fundamentally shifted the approaches to and questions around the history of class relations in Britain and understandings of the drivers of historical change.[21]

[19] Dennis L. Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Post-war Britain: History, the New Left and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997); Wade Matthews *The New Left, National Identity, and the Break-Up of Britain;* Lin Chun, *British New Left* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993).
[20] Compared to historiography of France, where this generation of '68er' 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 Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 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).
[21] The decade long debates between Anderson and EP Thompson are recounted in full in Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Post-War Britain*, pp. 108-116 and esp 219-245.

It was in the midst of this general reconfiguration of Marxist thought in Western Europe that Mitchell asserted the pivotal importance and the unique position of women. Most importantly, Althusser's elevation of the importance of the superstructure offered Mitchell a new way to analyse how contradictions could be exacerbated and even produced by changes unrelated to labour and the economic base. This shift was of fundamental importance to a feminist analysis such as Mitchell's, which took as its premise the fact that the isolation of women outside the economic sphere was one determinant feature of their inequality. The challenge was to explain why this isolation had happened, without defaulting to arguments around biological capacity or, by extension, the natural family. In both her critique of existing theory and in the development of her own, Mitchell thus used Althusser in order to define and, especially, to delimit the determining role of the economic base on the oppression of women. This analysis emphasised that women's oppression could and had taken different historical forms that did not necessarily follow directly from changes in capital, though oppression was often reconstituted with relation these changes. Althusser's formulation of Marxism offered Mitchell the means by which to render 'sex' historical and therefore politically actionable.

Though such uses of Althusser seem at first to be a radical departure from the first New Left, Mitchell's account, like others of the second New Left, did assume a number of their progenitors' terms. Confronted with the apparent abeyance of class conflict and even the abeyance of class consciousness in the post-war period, theorists in Britain had begun to formulate new visions of class that were linked less to income and more to questions of tradition and culture. [22] This model sidestepped questions of 'false consciousness' among the working class by foregrounding inherited tradition instead. Mitchell had already been interested

[22] These features of the first New Left are emphasised by Dennis Dworkin, who labels it a form of humanist and cultural Marxism.

in the ways that 'mystifications' veiled the working of economic structures, thus throwing into question a number of classic assumptions about the relationship between class formation, class consciousness, and capital. Equally importantly, she had already used this disjuncture between 'mystification' and structure in order critique authors and politicians for simply, and unconsciously, reproducing the dominant ideologies of the time. Opposition, therefore, did not have to be material but could be intellectual, ideological, and cultural.

For Mitchell, the most important of these accounts was that of Welsh cultural critic Raymond Williams.[23] It was in homage to his *The Long Revolution*, published in 1961, that Mitchell named her own essay. In that book, Williams had argued that "we need quite different forms of analysis which would enable us to recognise the important contradictions within the patterns described, and even more crucially, the contradictions between different patterns of the general process of change".[24] This was exactly how Mitchell had interpreted Althusser, as advocating the isolation of different 'patterns' and roles and consequently analysing historical change as the alternation between gradual evolution and revolutionary conditions. Perhaps most importantly, Williams tended to downplay the role of class conflict, instead oscillating between models of an evolving common culture and an oppositional culture.[25] Mitchell, already in "Women: the Longest Revolution", did not see women's oppression as the product of the relationship between men and women.[26] Though she labelled it the 'bourgeois family ideology',

[23] Indeed, Williams is the only member of the first New Left offered reprieve, even approbation, in Perry Anderson's critical assessment of the theories of English class and society in "Origins of the Present Crisis" and "Components of a National Culture".
[24] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 294.
[25] Stuart Middleton, "Raymond Williams's 'Structure of Feeling' and the Problem of Democratic Values in Britain, 1939-1961", *Modern Intellectual History*, (2019). Thompson's criticisms of Williams for downplaying class conflict are recounted in Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 173-211.
[26] Though there were not yet, in 1966, any radical feminist theories that accounted for the ways that *men* oppressed women, Simone de Beauvoir's account in *The Second Sex* had already held that men 'othered' women in order to transcend nature and ensure their own status as a subject. See especially Sandrine Sanos, "Late Modern Feminist

Mitchell was also as yet tentative on the question of whose power was sustained by this ideology, given women within the bourgeoisie were equally oppressed. Where Althusser's focus on structural contradiction thus allowed Mitchell to transpose the causes and nature of women's oppression outside interpersonal relationships, Williams' emphasis on the "challenge to create new meanings" specified the tenacity of traditions and a potential program for change, which Mitchell adopted in her own recommendation that mystifications be further weakened through cultural stress on the decoupling of marriage, parenthood, and sexuality.

It was in this combination of Althusser and Williams that Mitchell's work was truly ground-breaking, not only for its application of Marxist theory to women but for its reconfiguration of Marxism more generally.[27] Though the second New Left had staked their claim with theory and Continental philosophy, Althusserians they were not – or not yet. In fact, Mitchell's 1966 "Women: the Longest Review" was the first article in the *New Left Review*, and probably in any article written by an English Marxist, to make use of Althusser at all.[28] In a novel move for a journal that prided itself on erudition, she even defined and explained Althusser's theory.[29] It was as much for its Marxism as for its topic that fellow member of the editorial board Quinton Hoare published a sustained criticism of Mitchell's essay in the

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Subversions: Sex, Subjectivity, and Embodiment" in Peter Gordon, Warren Breckman, *Cambridge History of Modern European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 318-321. I would like to thank Sandrine for sharing an advance copy of her article.

[27] Even Swindells and Jardine's excellent critical account of women's theory in the left, from within the left, focuses on the question of 'women', not of Althusser and the lasting influence of Mitchell's interpretation, in the "drowning out" of Mitchell's "seminal (for the Women's movement) 'Women: the Longest Revolution'" in the *Poverty of Theory* debate. Swindells, Jardine, *What's Left*, p. 28 and again p. 46. See also Lin Chun, *British New Left*, whose account of feminist theory revolves around Mitchell but is annexed to the conclusion, away from the remainder of her analysis, pp.

[28] 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.

[29] Despite the often impenetrable nature of Althusser's work, similar elaboration would not appear again in other articles that were indebted to him. See, for example, Anderson's "Components of a National Culture".

following issue.[30] 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".[31] 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".[32] 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. In some senses, Hoare's criticism that Mitchell "*excludes* history from her analysis" was perfectly correct. Mitchell had not followed the model of long-term, chronological development that had until then predominated in analyses of class relations in both the first and the second New Left. Though the much discussed Nairn-Anderson thesis took aim at the first New Left by claiming that the present crisis was structural, both Nairn and Anderson, for example, still placed the explanatory emphasis on the origins of British capitalism.[33] Mitchell, by contrast, isolated individual structures and their relation in the present moment alone. Hers was a synchronic analysis of the relationship between 'ideology' and 'reality'. This very organization, into individual structures at their present conjuncture, was one direct part of the ire that Althusser and his British

[30] The critique was the first critique written by an editor and directed work published 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.*

[31] Quintin Hoare "Discussion on 'Women: the Longest Revolution'", *New Left Review* no. 41 (1967), p. 80.

[32] 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.

[33] The classic articles are: 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), pp. 38-65; Tom Nairn, "The Nature of the Labour Party – 2", *New Left Review,* Vol. 28 (1964) pp. 33-62. Contrast with Anderson, "Components of the National Culture", *New Left Review*, No. 50 (1968), pp. 3-57.

exponents aroused in EP Thompson some years later.[34] Small wonder, then, that when EP Thompson did refer to socialist feminists in his critique of Althusser – as those who "attempt by arduous exercises of theory to insert a new flywheel (reproduction of the labour force) into the orrery, hoping its inertia will somehow miraculously motor all the variegated 'development forms' of sexual repression and expression, familial modes and gender roles" – he reproduced, in almost the exact order, the structures identified by Mitchell.[35]

Mitchell might have given credence to EP Thompson's claim that the insertion of women wholesale into Marxism had dulled the "their problem's whole challenge".[36] She insisted from her very opening sentence, and throughout all her subsequent work, that "the situation of women is different from that of any other social group".[37] But, though "Women: the Longest Revolution" articulated the nature of women's situation, she struggled to put a name on what that situation actually was. She oscillated variously between the "problem of women", the "moment of her exploitation", "women's subordination", the "enslavement of women", "women's condition", the "position and dignity of women in different societies", the "socio-economic situation of women", and the "pyramid of discrimination".[38] For someone who placed such an emphasis on the need for precise analytic terms that can capture and explain ideology and material reality, and for someone whose entire critique of existing literature on the problem

[34] EP Thompson, "Poverty of Theory – or an Orrery of Errors" 1978 *Marxists.org*, [https://www.marxists.org/archive/thompson-ep/1978/pot/essay.htm], accessed 20 November, 2019.
[35] This parallel is further reproduced in his contrast between "those concerned with sexual relations, gender roles, the forms and history of the family, kinship structures, child nurture, homosexuality, sexual psychology, the literature of profane and romantic love" and those "who had reduced all this to the metaphysical contemplation of the reproductive organs, which produced all these 'manifestations' and which, at the same time, reproduce themselves". Mitchell had focused on reproduction, arguing that the former categories had been reified under the latter as 'natural'. EP Thompson, "The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays".
[36] Thompson, "The Poverty of Theory".
[37] Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution", p. 11.
[38] Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution", p. 14, 12, 16, 33, 23, 29, 35.

of women lay on their failure to "*solve* it theoretically", this was a significant limitation.[39] It was in pursuit of this theoretical solution that Mitchell embarked on her future work in the Women's Liberation Movement.

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The month that "Women: the Longest Revolution" was published, Mitchell visited New York and began her involvement with the Women's Liberation Movement. Scheduled to present at the 1966 Socialist Scholars Conference, she immediately fell in with a group of women who had read her article. She developed a network of feminist activists and theorists and returned regularly to the United States in the following years. As the student movement began to flourish on both sides of the Atlantic, Mitchell joined the organizing board of the famous 1968 Anti-University, formed by anti-psychiatry trio RD Laing, David Cooper, and Aaron Esterton, where she was, once again, the only woman. [40] She ran a course on the position of women that met alternate Friday evenings to discuss women's status and how it had changed, or rather failed to change, in revolutions in China, Russia, Cuba, and Algeria. A wide-range of students, housewives, journalists, and a number of Americans attended. It was at the suggestion of an American participant that the class evolved into one of the first women's liberation collectives in London, the Peckham Rye Group. Alongside a group of anti-Vietnam activists in Tufnell Park and New Leftists from Shepherds Bush, they founded the London Women's Liberation Workshop in 1969.[41] The Workshop launched a bi-monthly journal and a series of public campaigns against women's oppression, plastering stickers on sexist advertising in

[39] "Women: the Longest Revolution", p. 12. Emphasis in original.
[40] On the Anti-University see Oisín Wall, *The British Anti-Psychiatrists: from Institutional Psychiatry to the Counter-Culture, 1960-1971* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 98-103.
[41] See the description by Janet Hadley in Michelene Wandor, ed., *Once a Feminist: Stories of a Generation* (London: Virago, 1990) pp. 74-76; Lois Graesle, pp. 129-30; Audrey Battersby, pp. 113-4. For a general history of the Women's Liberation Workshop see Eve Setch, "The London Women's Liberation Workshop 1969-1979: Organisation, Creativity, Debate" (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2000).

London train stations and, most famously, protesting the Miss Universe Competition in 1969 and disrupting it in 1970.

Due both to her early prominence and her cool, articulate style, Mitchell became a contributor on 'women's issues' in the press and in universities. The *New Statesman* began to commission her to review new books on women and the BBC brought her in to speak to the perspective of the women's liberation movement, pitting her against Conservative politicians like Sally Oppenheim or more notoriously Enoch Powell. In the first years of the Women's Liberation Movement, she began to translate her earlier concerns on mystification and education into a decidedly second-wave cast. She criticised art for its "mystification" of women's sexuality, and thereby for its failure to depict it for women, and pointed to the social conditions, especially within the family, that shaped the character and opportunities of young girls.[42] These accounts extended early distortions of "ideology" around the family onto the very image of men and women and thus the subjective dimensions of oppression.

These concerns made the way into Mitchell's first book proposal, which she sent to her publisher, Andre Schiffrin, in 1968 under the hasty title "a book on women".[43] Mitchell had met Schiffrin, the lead publisher at Pantheon books, through David Cooper, her partner at the time, and the two developed a lasting professional and personal friendship.[44] Much like Penguin, with whom Pantheon often shared publishing rights, Pantheon's sales of complex academic books

[42] 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. She repeated this critique in a lecture at the University of Connecticut in January 1972. See Terese Karel, "Make Role of Mother Brief, Feminist Says", *The Hartford Courant*, Jan 9 (1972), p. 39.

[43] 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.

[44] 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.

like Mitchell's as well as Laing, Cooper, Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Foucault were buoyed by an intellectually inclined counterculture and a publishing model with a good deal of flexibility thanks to support from Random House, of which it was an imprint.[45] It was with the intellectual support and financial freedom offered by Schiffrin and by Pantheon that Mitchell was able to leave her teaching job in 1970 and dedicate herself full-time to writing and to the movement.

In her proposal, Mitchell planned to study the position of women in society by examining how various disciplines had confronted the question 'what is woman?', and how their answers had been founded in the family. "The basic contention", Mitchell wrote Schiffrin, is that "women take their definition from the roles they play" which were "primarily to be found in the family".[46] She also laid new emphasis on the importance of women's experience of these roles, proposing to integrate theoretical discussion of how women were defined alongside interviews and personal accounts on "what it feels like to be a woman".[47] The elevation of domesticity and experience within the family, as against the "function" of women's roles within capitalism that had been central to "Women: the Longest Revolution", seems to indicate that she had been seriously marked by her early involvement with consciousness raising groups and especially with the Peckham Rye Group, which produced around this time a famous paper on the experience of the housewife and the drudgery of housework.[48] As she accordingly shifted the 'contradiction' of women's oppression from between ideology and material reality to

[45] Schiffrin, *The Business of Books*, pp. 44-5. On Penguin see Rylance, Rick. "Reading with a Mission: the Public Sphere of Penguin Books", *Critical Quarterly,* vol. 47, no. 4, 2005, pp. 48-66.
[46] 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.
[47] Letter to Andre Schiffrin with proposed book outline, 23 March 1969, p. 1. 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.
[48] The paper was first presented at the first Women's Liberation Confernece at Ruskin, Oxford in 1970 and serialized in *Black Dwarf* and in Michelene Wandor, *The Body Politic: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement in Briatain 1969-1972* (London: SW Litho Ltd, 1972), pp. 31-5. Mitchell has said that she and a few others in the group who were university educated helped the women to write it. Juliet Mitchell, "Juliet Mitchell", Michelene Wandor, ed., *Once a Feminist: Stories of a Generation* (London: Virago, 1990), p. 108.

expectation and experience, a small but fundamental shift, Mitchell reached a striking conclusion. "The 'essence' of woman" she wrote "had nothing to do with the physical, psychological reality of any particular woman – it is a role distortion of identity". She intimated that this disjuncture between experience and ideal was such that there was no reality underpinning a collective of 'women' at all.

By comparison with "Women: the Longest Revolution", this book proposal was remarkably absent any material frame and indeed any Marxist one. Instead, as Mitchell herself has suggested and Terri Chattier has shown, Mitchell was indebted here in tone and in concept to the anti-psychiatry movement.[49] RD Laing and David Cooper's anti-psychiatry had critiqued the distorting influence of hierarchical family structures on self and health.[50] Given the predominance it accorded the relationship between self, family and social roles, it is easy to see how anti-psychiatry offered useful analytic terms to second-wave feminism.[51] Though "Women: the Longest Revolution" had already been concerned with the intersection of women's confinement in the family and women's oppression, the family remained secondary in Marxist analysis, and she had still concluded in 1966 that women's liberation would come only with entry into the labour force. Anti-psychiatry, like Raymond Williams' cultural Marxism, elevated the private sphere to a fundamentally social sphere, and made the family a central determinate for social and economic relations. This focus on character and experience in anti-psychiatry, as well as in the women's movement, pointed to new parallels between women's 'service' role in the workplace and in the family and caused Mitchell to doubt her earlier hope

[49] Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's estate*, p.
[50] Teri Chattiar, "The Psychiatric Family: Citizenship, Private Life and Emotional Health in Welfare-State Britain, 1945-1979" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Northwestern University 2013), p. 307. See also Iain Ferguson, "Making Sense of Madness: Revisiting RD Laing", *Critical and Radical Social Work*, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 75.
[51] Mignon Nixon, ' "Why Freud?" asked the *Shrew*: *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, *Post-Partum Document,* and the History Group", *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, Vol. 20 (2015), pp. 136-7.

that women's liberation could come through production, even if the oppression had not originated there.[52] Anti-psychiatry thus offered a new way to consider ways imposed and distorting categories were consistent across the institutions that women occupied. It also made the notion of 'women' number among such impositions.[53] She now concluded, in terms strikingly close to Laing and Cooper, that only freedom from the notion of 'woman' could "allow men and women to be as different as their individuality required them to be".[54]

These new considerations posed new problems for the relationship between the burgeoning women's liberation movement and Marxism. "The history of women is the history of what men (and women) think women should be- in this sense women become sheer negation", she had written in her book proposal.[55] Given the category of 'women' was "sheer negation", not grounded in any material reality, was it possible to form a political movement around it? This tension between the 'fiction' of the category of woman and the fact of feminism, well known in histories of post-structuralism, was of earlier importance than is often recognised.[56] Mitchell's first conclusion was that women did not, as women, have a history. "Women have a situation", she wrote in a review for *The New Statesman* in 1967*,* "not a history", for "with a few

[52] Untitled Manuscript, dated March 1969 in "Talk Transcripts and Interviews (Including Published Copies)" Box, p. 2**,** *Black Dwarf* article p. 11, book proposal p. 5.
[53] This was also encouraged by the fact that, as Mitchell herself later pointed out in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, anti-psychiatry never talked of the different distortions between the sexes.
[54] 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.
[55] 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.
[56] C.f. Daniel Rodger's account of the 'fracture' of the idea of woman in the late 1970s and early 1980s in *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2011), pp. 144-179. It is an account often premised on the predominance of 'sisterhood' in the early 1970s and its rupture with the recognition of difference in later years: Mitchell might be an outlier, but she was rarely one to think or write in terms of 'sisterhood'. One famous reading here is Denise Riley's *Am I That Name?: Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1988).

individuals as exceptions, women's history has been that of their husband's or father's class".[57] It was class or the family from which women derived their nature and functions, for these two institutions had a history. The fundamental problem, then, was what this 'absence' meant for political consciousness. If, following Marx, consciousness derived from the collective economic conditions for the proletariat, what were the conditions that could allow for the rise of women's consciousness? And would this consciousness then reproduce the oppression in the first place? Mitchell did not, as yet, have answers to these questions. Her praise was instead for the women's liberation groups in England and the US whose "assault is on the ideological concepts of women" for "it is these that underpin their entire socio-economic position".[58]

Mitchell explored these questions – on the relationship between Marxism and feminism, on the nature of women's consciousness, and on the category of 'woman' – within a reading group known as the 'History Group'.[59] The Group was composed of primarily of women who had known one another for some time, and they began meeting shortly after the first national Women's Liberation Conference in February, 1970.[60] Like Mitchell, Rosalind Delmar, Sally Alexander, Anna Davin, Mary Kelly, Laura Mulvey, Branka Magas, Mary Kennedy and Margaret Walters had been involved in left politics for a number of years, whether through left publications like *Black Dwarf* and *7 Days* or through student politics. Quite a number of them were married or in serious relationships with men on the *New Left Review*, half of them were

[57] 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.

[58] Untitled Manuscript, dated March 1969 in "Talk Transcripts and Interviews (Including Published Copies)" Box, p. 8.

[59] Rosalind Delmar, C1420 *Sisterhood and After: the Women's Liberation Oral History Project***,** p. 86

[60] Mitchell sat on the organizing committee along with fellow members Anna Davin and Sally Alexander.

mothers, many of them had also attended Oxford or Cambridge. Study groups like these became a marked feature of Women's Lib in London, as the studiously oriented attempted to remedy the structureless drift of many other small groups and to dedicate themselves to a precise set of questions or themes.[61] The question that preoccupied the History Group, as Laura Mulvey remembered it, was "whether or not 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".[62] The History group thus read broadly, taking in the gamut of Engels and Marx, as well as Mao, Eleanor Marx, Edward Aveling, Lévi-Strauss and, finally, Freud.[63] 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".[64] "It produced a space", Delmar reflected, "in which we could find a common language, inhabit each other's skins".[65]

In searching for the origins of women's oppression, and understanding its perpetuation, the History Group were on the hunt for a new theory of women. The topic was central to early second-wave investigations, especially within socialist feminism, for the origin of women's oppression related intimately to the question of whether oppression predated capitalism and therefore underpinned to the relationship between the Marxist revolution and the feminist one.[66]

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[61] 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.
[62] 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
[63] 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: the Women's Liberation Oral History Project*.
[64] Juliet Mitchell, "Theory as Object", *October*, Vol. 113 (2005), p. 36.
[65] 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.
[66] 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

Members of the History Group, and indeed most socialist feminists, were united in the belief that women's oppression was not only economically determined and, equally importantly, that the specific problems of the oppression of women exceeded the terms offered by Marxist theory. In an early review of the Women's Liberation Movement, Mitchell and Delmar concluded that "the strategic strength of feminism is that it first located the general problem – that of the oppression of women – and tried *as a movement* to specify it".[67] Members of the History Group tended accordingly to be highly critical of accounts and movements, from Eva Figes to the Dutch *Dolle Mina*, that downplayed the unique nature of women's oppression and therefore "failed to specify" it.[68] In a speech given in the early 1970s, Mitchell outlined explicitly what such a theory of women's oppression would look like. It had to do more than simply articulate the present condition of women, Mitchell said, but rather it had to elucidate "the changing, concrete conditions of oppression, exploitation and conflict".[69] In other words, it had to resemble Marxism and articulate three clear elements: the nature of consciousness, an analysis of the specific dynamics of conflict in the present, and a general law of this conflict throughout history.[70] By offering an explanation both of the "general law" and of the specific iteration, this theory of women's oppression would thus also be a theory of women's liberation.

[67] In the early 1970s, it was common to distinguish between 'liberationists', who believed in revolution, and 'feminists', or the strain of radical feminism common to the US. 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]

[68] Branka Magas, "Sex Politics/Class Politics", *New Left Review*, no. 66, March/April (1971), pp. 69-92; Margaret Walters, "Dolle Mina and the Dutch Dilemma", *Shrew: Special Double Issue* Dec (1970), pp. 11-14. Mitchell would reproduce Walters' account in *Woman's estate***,** pp.

[69] 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.

[70] Mitchell, Delmar, "Women's Liberation in Britain" p. 8; 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

Equally central to this analysis was the specific analytic terms deployed to understand women's situation. By 1970, the History Group had clearly settled upon "oppression", which they defined in their special issue of *Shrew,* the bimonthly magazine of the Women's Liberation Workshop, as "a situation of social domination in the context of TOTAL environment, distinguishing it from exploitation which defines the way a person's labour is appropriated under a given productive system".[71] As Mitchell later recalled in an interview with Toril Moi, "liberation" and "oppression" were "umbrella terms that needed defining and that needed more analysis in themselves, but we had to use them as hypothetical concepts in lieu of anything else".[72] The distinction of 'oppression' from socialist definitions of 'exploitation', which related to labor, production and class, was absolutely crucial, especially when contrasting accounts of women's oppression increasingly began to locate its origins within women's 'labour' as housewives and thus to define women's situation within more strictly material terms.[73] As Mitchell told Margaret Benston, whose 1969 article "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation" was among the first of this ilk, the argument that housework was a form of labour ignored both the marginal contribution of reproductive housework to a system of production based on exchange and that the problem of women's oppression clearly went far beyond their work as housewives.[74] In other words, Mitchell concluded that arguments that simply

[71] Mary Kelly summarizing group discussions in "National Liberation Movements and Women's Liberation", *Shrew*, Dec (1970), p. 2.
[72] Juliet Mitchell in Toril Moi, "Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Politics: A Conversation with Juliet Mitchell", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 93, No. 4 (1994), pp. 946-7. See also her comments in Wendy Holloway, Juliet Mitchell, Julie Walsh, "Interview with Juliet Mitchell – *Psychoanalysis and Feminism:* Then and Now", *Psychoanalysis, Culture, and Society,* Vol. 20 (2015), p. 115
[73] For more on the domestic labour debate, see Maxine Molyneux, "Beyond the Domestic Labour Debate", *New Left Review*, No. 116 (1979), pp. 3-27; Lise Vogel, "Domestic Labor Revisited", *Science and Society* Vol. 64, No. 2 (2000), pp. 151-170.
[74] Benston, a Canadian scientist, had critiqued "Women: the Longest Revolution" for failing to recognise that women did perform a form of labour. 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] and Mitchell's reply: Juliet Mitchell, "Response letter to Paul Sweezy" 13 Oct 1969 in, "Reviews and Unpublished Book Drafts folder", JM Archive, University of Essex.

transposed women's oppression into a Marxist framework were insufficient both on Marxist and feminist terms.[75] In order to explain the complete nature of women's oppression, feminists needed something more than Marxism, something analogous to it.

The analysis would have to begin, therefore, with a focus on "that immediate situation – the painful awareness that we as women are all oppressed and accept our oppression".[76] This emphasis on complicity, which collapsed the difference between how women are and how they should be, was evidently a theme in the History Group's discussions. Sally Alexander and Laura Mulvey argued that the Miss World protests represented "a blow against passivity, not only the enforced passivity of the girls on the stage but the passivity that we all felt in ourselves".[77] Mitchell's views on this question of consciousness and the category of women evolved in tandem. In a speech given at the American Historical Association Convention in December 1970, she argued that women were not only silent in the historical record but also silent within history itself. Rather than a putative history of women, which she still believed impossible, she urged historians to attempt to explain this double contradiction: between the oppression of women, such that they are silent people, and the writing of history, such that women's actions go unnoticed.[78]

This was a significant evolution in her understanding of women as a category and of women's oppression. Mitchell had been explicit since "Women: the Longest Revolution" that women represented a particular problem within and for Marxism, and that women's oppression

[75] Mitchell and Benston never did see eye-to-eye: in her review of Mitchell's *Woman's estate*, Benston argued that Mitchell tried too hard to privilege the sexuality and socialization to the minimization of economic factors. Benston, "Woman's estate: Juliet Mitchell", *The Pedestal*, Vol. 4, No. 4 April (1973), p. 11.
[76] Walters, "Dolle Mina", p. 14.
[77] "Why Miss World", *Shrew: Special Double Issue* Dec (1970), p. 17. The essay is anonymous, but Laura Mulvey identified herself and Alexander as the authors in her introduction to *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).
[78] Juliet Mitchell, "Pride and Prejudice: the History of Women's History, Paper Presented to the American Historical Association Convention, Boston, December 29", pp. 3-4 in Article drafts and interviews, JM Archive, University of Essex.

required specific tools to achieve it. The focus on women's complicity within the social structure, rather than the disjuncture they felt within it, elided the previous problems Mitchell had with her analysis of women's consciousness and the potential for a movement based on women, a category that did not exist in reality. In part, this was also endorsed by the explosion of the women's liberation movement itself: it was clear that there could be a political movement based on women, for one existed. It was also endorsed by her emphasis on creating this consciousness amongst women, which was an underplayed but central element of the much discussed "consciousness raising" groups famous to the women's liberation movement. The central nature of such groups was, as often assumed, simply to understand and support women's difficult experiences, but rather to elaborate the laws and structures that governed them and with which experiences were complicit. Hence, members of the History Group were intensely dismissive of radical feminist work that championed women's supposed beneficial qualities. "Re-evaluations of feminine attributes *accept* the results of an exploitative situation by endorsing its concepts", Delmar and Mitchell wrote, the task was thus to change "the social structure that gives rise to those values in the first place".[79] "The idea that we can elevate feminine values from their debased position", Mitchell wrote one year later, "assumes the absurd: that these values are not, precisely, the painful and desperate products of oppression".[80] The basis for an analysis of women's oppression, just like the basis for women's consciousness, thus had to be the oppression itself.

The search for a specific theory that could be applied to women and that intersected with, though was separate from, Marxism also drove the History Group's research into "analogous" forms of oppression in race and imperialism. The Group was tentative about the potential utility

[79] Mitchell, Delmar, "Women's Liberation in Britain" p. 8.
[80] Juliet Mitchell, "What is a Woman?: II", *New York Times*, Dec 14, 1971, p. 45.

of these comparisons, and described them "useful as partial definitions of partial aspects of women's work or women's specific position" but unable to provide a total theory.[81] The comparison between post-colonial and feminist movements drew the Group's attention to the intersection of ideologies like racism or sexism and exploitation. On the basis of their discussion, they concluded that, unlike in under economic exploitation, 'oppression' was primarily psychological, with hierarchies ensured "through the 'dominant ideology'…being promoted by institutions such as church, school, family and particularly the mass media".[82] The comparison also demonstrated their pre-existing sense that it was not 'men' who were not the true oppressors, but rather the capitalist or colonial structures. National liberation and oppressions based on race therefore seemed to affirm both the possibility of integrating women into the Marxist model whilst also providing some tools to elaborate Marxist theory and thus address the singularity of the 'woman question'.

This kind of reasoning, which acknowledged the mutually reinforcing nature of race, class, and imperialism but proceeded to analyse 'women' regardless, has tended to baffle historians of second-wave feminism and recent feminist theorists.[83] How could second-wave feminists such as Mitchell and the History Group explicitly recognize that women of colour suffered a particular and exacerbated oppression and then fail to integrate it into their theory? How could race be considered only 'analogous' to gender? There is a certain utility to this question, as it offers insights into the presumptions around and approaches to Marxism and feminism for

[81] "Talk to Norwegian Students" in in Talk transcripts 1, JM Archive, University of Essex, p. 6.
[82] Kelly, "National Liberation Movements and Women's Liberation", p. 2. Though they write of 'ideology', I would argue this definition is closer to 'indoctrination' than to Althusser's definition of 'ideology'. They, and especially Mitchell, would use Althusser's ideology primarily to talk about 'the 'lived' relation between men and their world", a phrase which is absent from this journal issue and ubiquitous just a few months later.
[83] Cf. Natalie Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993.* The question is further compounded by new recognition that feminist movements run by women of colour always existed alongside, and questioned, white feminists. See Kathleen A. Lauhlin et. Al. eds. "Is it time to jump ship? Historians rethink the waves metaphor", *Feminist Formations*, Vol. 22 (2010), pp. 76-135.

women's liberation groups in the 1970s. As we have seen, the driving question for the feminist movement in this period was the nature of women's oppression: its origins, its seeming universality, and its longevity. These questions were compounded by the fact that Mitchell, and the History Group, always placed the category of 'woman' in question. If 'women' were defined by how they were 'seen', 'women' were only united by the fact that "they are everything and everywhere differently regarded and yet everywhere they are 'women'".[84] They were united, therefore, by their oppression. The very theory the History Group thought thus had to explain both the general structure of oppression while still understanding to different cultures and eras. They believed that, only after they found this theory, could women's oppression be united alongside a theory of racial oppression and Marxism as a theory of class oppression to understand how the social structure in total.

This approach can be counterposed to the analytic often employed by later feminists, and by historians, to understand the 'intersectional' nature of women's oppression. 'Intersectionality' investigates how various oppressions such as race, sex, sexuality, and class work in tandem to structure an individual's experience. The term was first coined by feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, in which she brilliantly demonstrated how the experiences of women of colour were occluded by discrimination laws limited remit of either race or to sex.[85] The theory, discrimination, failed to capture the reality. Where 'intersectionality' therefore moves from social expectations down toward the individual experience that escapes them, Mitchell and the History Group were increasingly moving in the

[84] [untitled essay] in Box: Talk Transcripts and interviews (including published copies), JM Archive, University of Essex, p. 6. Though this essay is undated, I would estimate that it was written shortly after 1970 but before 1972. Mitchell draws heavily on Althusser's newly published notion of ideology as the 'way we live ourselves', but does not discuss psychoanalysis, a subject ubiquitous in her writing after the publication of *Woman's estate*.
[85] C.f. Crenshaw "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color", *Stanford Law Review*, 1241 (1991).

opposite direction: they had begun to explore 'experience' in order to understand the social norms and codes that not only shaped but dictated it. The second-wave inquiry was thus governed by an expectation of what the norm was and that the norm was white and bourgeois: as, they would have also argued, it had to be, for they conceived ideology as the product of the hegemonic class that allowed it to maintain its power. It certainly flattened the distinctions between various oppressions. But it applied the category of 'woman' in a logical and consistent way that truly acknowledged the differences between women, only placed the emphasis not on their common situation but their common, secondary status. For this type of theory to 'recognize' the completely different nature of black women's oppression, and arguably recognize black feminism, they would have to invert the focus from common social norm to the disaggregated experience in the face of that norm. This shift took place in the 1980s, precisely when Crenshaw began to write of 'intersectionality'.

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It was within the History Group and in search of a theory that captured the unique position of women within ideology that Juliet Mitchell began to read Freud. Mitchell entered the British Museum at the beginning of the summer of 1970, intending to read just a few of his articles on femininity. Instead, she read his entire collected works. The reading experience was transformative and Mitchell was converted. One meeting, Sally Alexander remembers, Mitchell marched into the group: "'Psychoanalysis' Juliet said (as I recall) 'addresses female sexuality, sexual difference, women's desire and we're not reading it".[86] As Mitchell wrote in her first article on the subject, published that December, Freud was preoccupied with "the meaning of

[86] Sally Alexander in Mary Kelly, "Conversation on 'On the passage of a few people through a rather brief period of time", http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/50401 [accessed 22 January 2018], p. 6

being a woman, the nature of femininity. Simply – what is it?".[87] Freud's famous question mirrored, in other words, the very one that Mitchell and the History Group had been grappling with over the previous months. Freud, unlike Marx or Reich or Laing or any of the other theorists that the women's movement had been reading, spoke directly on women.

In her quest to claim psychoanalysis for feminism, Mitchell drew heavily once again on the work of Louis Althusser. Althusser had turned to psychoanalysis in the early 1960s, adopting some of Freud's terms, such as "overdetermination", to supplement Marxist notions of the dialectic, and acting a crucial champion of Jacques Lacan, providing Lacan with his institutional home at the *École normale supérieure* after 1963 and the forum for the weekly seminars that eventually won Lacan his vast popular acclaim. Althusser's personal debt to psychoanalysis was most clearly explicated in the brief essay "Freud and Lacan", first published in *La Nouvelle Critique* in 1964 and translated by the *New Left Review* in 1969. Mitchell probably read the essay sometime the following year. In "Freud and Lacan", Althusser argued that Freud was the inventor of a true "science", for Freud, in his discovery of the unconscious, had discovered a theretofore unknown object and had then explicated the laws that governed it and the methods that could reveal its "essence". Against decades of distortion and misuse by faux analysts, Althusser claimed that Lacan's "return to Freud" had finally restored psychoanalysis to the status of science by returning, as it were, to the unconscious. Both Althusser's interpretation of psychoanalysis, as well as the length he dedicated to theorising the nature of "sciences" generally, make sense only in light of Althusser's own famous campaign to revitalise Marxism by ridding it of the monocausal economic explanations and the existentialist

[87] Juliet Mitchell, "Why Freud?", *Shrew*, Dec (1970), p. 23.

humanism that he felt had caused its degradation.[88] Staged as a defence of psychoanalysis against Marxist critics in an orthodox Franco-Marxist journal, "Freud and Lacan" also doubled as a critique of contemporaneous readings of Marx and a restoration of the status of 'mature scientific Marx'.[89] These two projects – the rejuvenation of Marxism and the rescue of psychoanalysis – came together in Althusser's earliest formulations of social reproduction and 'ideology'.

Althusser's reading of psychoanalysis was thus suffused with his other concerns, already present in "Contradiction and Over-Determination", of the relationship between the base and the superstructure and, by extension, between the determinants to and limits upon historical change. He argued that psychoanalysis therefore offered historical materialism an account of the "effects of the humanization of the small biological creature", when the future of an unmarked baby was determined by their induction into what Althusser variously called the "Law of Order" and the "Law of Culture" (which was a meaningful departure from Lacan's "Law of the Father").[90]At the heart of this process was the Oedipus complex, described as "the long forced march which makes mammiferous larvae into human children, *masculine* or *feminine subjects*".[91] Althusser argued, in short, that humans became human within the "Law of Order" and they thus lived the "social order" as men and women for the rest of their lives, unconsciously reproducing its terms.

[88] See Althusser's introduction "To My English Readers" in the translated version of *For Marx*, Ben Brewster [trans] (London: Verso 2005 [1969]), pp. 9-16, esp. pp. 10-11 as well as Ed Baring, *The Young Derrida*, pp. 265-279; Camille Robcis, "Structuralism and the Return of the Symbolic" in Peter Gordon, Warren Breckman (eds), *The Cambridge History of Modern European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 485-6.
[89] Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital* (New York: Panethon Books, 1970); Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* Ben Brewster [trans] (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001 [1971]), pp. 85-126.
[90] Althusser, "Freud and Lacan", *New Left Review* Vol. 55, p. 55.
[91]Althusser, "Freud and Lacan", p. 57. Emphasis in original.

From her very first discussion of Freud, in her paper "Why Freud?" published in the History Group's issue of *Shrew* in December 1970, Mitchell adopted a number of Althusser's claims. Much as Althusser had claimed that Freud was a theoretical loner, adrift in the biologism of fin-de-siecle Vienna, Mitchell cast him as a radical who preached the importance of sexuality in a time of Victorian conservatism. She also used Althusser's criticism of the predominance of ego psychology to dismiss the primary second-wave apprehensions about Freud, claiming that 'penis envy' and 'biological femininity' were the distortions of his interlocutors rather than the products of his own theory. Most importantly, Mitchell followed Althusser by elevating the Oedipus complex, and the creation of boys and girls, to the centre of her interpretation of Freud. It in the Oedipus complex, she explained, "where the infant with specific male or female sex organs, yet retaining a bi-sexual disposition (could develop that is, with the social-sexual characteristics of either sex), becomes socialized (or humanized) according to one possibility, the one that is felt corresponds with his anatomy".[92]

In all of her writings on psychoanalysis, from 1970 to when *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* was published in 1974, it was Mitchell's evolving account of the Oedipus complex that offered the key to her gradual development of a theory of women's oppression and liberation premised on psychoanalysis. In "Why Freud?", she explained the complex thusly: that the young boy, who loves his mother, is caught between hating the father for possessing her and fearing castration at the father's hand. Through this nexus of hate and fear, the boy "buries his hatred by identifying with the object of it", the father, and thus assumes his destiny as a future man.[93] The little girl, by contrast, loves her father and hates her mother. However, and here Mitchell departed from Althusser, the girl's relationship to the complex was different. Unlike the father,

[92] Mitchell, "Why Freud", p. 24.
[93] Mitchell, "Why Freud", p. 24.

the mother was clearly not the powerful figure in the mother, father, child relationship, not to mention that the girl, having no penis, had no castration to fear. The girl thus had no need to renounce her desires so strongly. The little girl, Mitchell argued, remained locked within the "Oedipal scene", with lasting consequences.[94] Mitchell thus transformed the Oedipal moment into the simultaneous creation of sexual difference and of women's inferiority. The girl, upon learning the priority accorded to the penis and without need to succumb so strongly to what Althusser termed the "Law of Order", was left marked.

This first reading already established the components that would be central to Mitchell's evolving account of women's oppression: the central relationship of father, mother, child, the role of desire in distinguishing between boys and girls, the effects of oppression on subjectivity, and the synecdoche between 'power', 'order', and 'penis', 'father'. She was unsatisfied with this initial account, though, and declared as much, writing that it "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".[95] Her attempt to explain these two presuppositions over the next years would involve rethinking the premises of the entire theory.

While psychoanalysis therefore provided an answer for a new question – how does one become a woman? – Althusser's other famous theorisation on 'ideology' provided a way for Mitchell to reconsider what woman was. Though many have claimed that it was 'ideology' that sent Mitchell in search of Freud, it was really only after 1970 that Althusser's famous description of ideology as "the 'lived' relation between men and their world" became ubiquitous in Mitchell's writings and her speeches.[96] She thus developed her theories about

[94] Mitchell, "Why Freud", p. 24. This reading was clearly indebted to Freud's 1933 essay on "Femininity", an essay which Mitchell continually reinterpreted over the following four years.
[95] Juliet Mitchell, "Why Freud?", p. **?.**
[96] Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 252.

'ideology' in tandem with her evolving understandings of psychoanalysis. "Following Althusser", Mitchell wrote in 1971, "we can say of ideology that it is a system of representations (images, myths, ideas, etc)…not the relation between men and the conditions of their existence, but the way they live that relationship".[97] This reading of ideology did crucial work, as it helped to resolve her long-standing confusions between the clear fact of women's political consciousness and the fiction of the category of women. Ideology also rendered irrelevant her previous focus on the disjuncture between the category of women, and women's experience: a disjuncture that, arguably, exacerbated rather than helped explain the problem of women's consciousness. With ideology, Mitchell thus made the transition from "women are a category, are an idea"[98] to the "*concept* 'woman' is very much a part of the way men and women experience their lives".[99] Of course, this transition was fairly smooth, for it built directly on Mitchell's earliest concern with mystification and the History Group's growing conviction that women were complicit in this mystification. Ideology therefore provided a theoretical base for many of the notions the History Group were beginning to experiment with in the 1970s around the relationship between consciousness, social expectations, and the experience of oppression. "From our shared recognition", Mitchell wrote, "we now have to move to a position of *cognition*: a knowledge which works out the relationship of what it feels like to what it is".[100] In fact, Mitchell's early engagement with psychoanalysis attempted to do just this, by integrating her own experiences into her read of Freud and, especially, by taking seriously many of the negative stereotypes of femininity, from vanity to envy to conservatism,

[97] 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.
[98] Juliet Mitchell, "Pride and Prejudice: the History of Women's History: Paper Presented to the American Historical Association Convention, Boston, December 29 [1970]", "Box: Article drafts and interviews", JM Archive, University of Essex.
[99] Mitchell, "Sexual Politics", p. 290. Emphasis in original.
[100] Mitchell, "Sexual Politics", p. 289

that Freud was charged with unconsciously reproducing.[101] Comparing housewives to peasants, Mitchell explained that one "cannot inhabit a small and backward world without it doing something to you".[102] It was within the terms of 'ideology', then, that Mitchell first began to grapple seriously with the effects of oppression upon politics and the psyche, and to consider, though in a very preliminary fashion, the nature of the 'unconscious'. These considerations marked a serious shift, in this sense, in her analytic approach, from dismantling in "Women: the Longest Revolution" the mythic unity of the bourgeois family, to understanding how this myth, as 'ideology' worked in the first place. Ideology therefore made "what is woman?", understood via historical materialism, and 'how does one become woman – and with what effects', understood via psychoanalysis, two sides of the same coin.

At some point during these years, between the writing of "Why Freud?" at the end of 1970 and the publication of *Woman's estate* in the middle of 1972, Mitchell read the work of Jacques Lacan. Lacan's work was difficult to find in English in the early 1970s: his *Écrits* had only been published in French in 1966 and would not be translated for another decade, the *New Left Review* had published the famous essay on the "mirror stage" in 1969, and, most importantly, Lacan's manifesto-like Rome Discourse had been translated into English by American literary scholar Anthony Wilden in 1968. None of Lacan's later work on femininity had yet been published, and it was primarily his early material from the 1950s that was available. Mitchell knew of Lacan, of course, she had read "Freud and Lacan", had been on the editorial board of the *New Left Review*, and she had recommended and reviewed work Lacan's analysand Octave Mannoni.[103] Rosalind Delmar remembers visiting Paris with Mitchell in the early 1970s and

[101] Juliet Mitchell, "Theory as Object", *October*, Vol. 113 (2005), p. 28
[102] Mitchell, *Woman's estate*, p.
[103]. *Woman's estate, **p.;*** Juliette Mitchell [sp], "Freud: the Man, his world, his influence, edited by Jonathan miller, Weidenfeld & Nicholson", *Spare Rib,* Issue 6 December (1972), p. 30. It is likely that she had met Mannoni and

attending one of Lacan's famous seminars, after which the two of them attempted, with frustration and little success, to read his notoriously elliptical work.[104] In other words, though Mitchell used some of his terminology and though many have argued that she worked in the mould of Lacan, Mitchell was not a committed Lacanian.

The initial influence of Lacan's work was evident in Mitchell's adoption of the notion of the 'phallus' and her gradual reconsideration of the nexus of father, patriarchy, and social power. Though her account of the Oedipus complex in *Woman's estate* matched the one in "Why Freud" nearly word by word, she did begin to substitute 'phallus' for 'penis', and began to indicate the ideological rather than actual qualities, as she exchanged the "penis is the most valued of all" for "the idea of the phallus is the most powerful of all".[105] In many ways, this shift is indicative less of the influence of Lacan's "Symbolic", for whom the Phallus represents the divided meaning between signifier and signified or imaginary and real, than a deepening attachment to Althusser's 'Law of Order' in which symbols like the Phallus had a much more direct relationship with power and positions. Mitchell began to increasingly associate 'Phallus', 'penis', and 'patriarchy', in which fathers were literally elevated over women. Thus, with the exception of this substitution, Mitchell's adoption of 'the idea of the phallus' was more an evolution of her earlier questions and approaches under ideology rather than any drastic break in her assumptions.

The writing of *Woman's estate* was a rush of six feverish weeks alongside her deepening study of psychoanalysis and daily participation in the Women's Liberation Movement.[106] By

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his wife Maude, herself a prominent psychoanalyst of children and a fan of British anti-psychiatry, when Mitchell was involved with the anti-psychiatrists. See Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co: a History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925-1985* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 493-4.

[104] Delmar C1420 *Sisterhood and After*

[105] Mitchell, "Why Freud?", p. 24. Mitchell, *Woman's estate*

[106] Juliet Mitchell, "Looking back at *Woman's Estate*" *Verso* 3 February 2015 https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1836-juliet-mitchell-looking-back-at-woman-s-estate [accessed: 29 Jan 2020].

the time that the book was released, Mitchell was immersed in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* and, so, her press coverage and responses seem almost to be referring to an entirely different book. Preliminary engagement with Lacan and her new questions on ideology and family came to fruition in a new account of the Oedipus complex. The first, and most significant change, was in the sexuality of young children. Likely inspired by her reading of Lacan's "Rome Discourse", Mitchell now began her account with all children's primary love for the mother, who they seek to possess from the father. Compulsory heterosexuality, which anyway contradicted her attempt to argue that infants had the capacity to develop into either sex regardless of genitalia, was thus erased. This shift was bound to a change in the role of the father and in her thinking on patriarchy. In her first account, Mitchell had not given any reason why children would repress their sexual feelings toward their parents: following Althusser, she had implied that the social order, of which the child was now cognisant, had instructed them to do so. Now, the father assumed a very active role in deed, coming "along in his powerful role to intervene and stop this love".[107] In this retelling, the social order thus became embodied in the father, whose entry into the relationship between mother and child thus literalized the entry of the Law of Order. Other classic features of inheritance – class, status, even the father's name – marked Mitchell's transformation of the Oedipal moment into a patriarchal one centred on the enforcement of the father's power in institution and psyche. The effect on the girl changed accordingly. Where previously, the girl had simply realised her secondary lot in life, now Mitchell's account was structured around the reaction to the father's "phallic power". The girl must learn that she cannot possess such power, though Mitchell could not yet explain why this made the girl transfer her affections from mother to father. This new telling of the Oedipus

[107] Socialist scholars speech, p. 14.

complex was, Mitchell explained, a "very asymmetric process" in which children learned their position in the patriarchal social hierarchy by their relation to the father.

In this account of the Oedipus complex, Mitchell was beginning to combine an analysis of the patriarchal family with an analysis of ideology. Each family member played a particular role in this process of 'humanization', roles that she was better able to distinguish through Lacan's emphatic foregrounding of the father and whose active function were entailed by Althusser's definition of ideology. At the same time, though, she was careful to distinguish between the 'function' of the role and the person who performed it. As she told the audience, "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".[108] In other words, the definitive factor in the equation was now not the ways that the child actually lived the Oedipus complex but rather the patriarchal structure in which he did. Ideology structured the experience of the father and the child simultaneously. What Mitchell thus took from Lacan, and also from Althusser's notion of the arrival of ideology and the social Order, was the intervention of sexual difference into a loving relationship. The father's active imposition brought "particular attributes…redolent with all the assumptions about being-a-father" in a patriarchal society.[109] From his arrival, the child began to identify itself as a person and also by sex.

This shift toward the "role of the father in patriarchal society" also drove Mitchell to think more deeply about the role of the mother. By bringing to the fore the primary relationship between mother and child, Mitchell began to consider the relationship between 'child birth' and child-raising', two tasks that had been strictly divided in her earlier work. "The mother has a

[108] Socialist scholars speech, pp. 12-13.
[109] Juliet Mitchell, "What is Woman?: I", *New York Times*, Dec 13, 1971, p. 39.

physical relationship with the infant", she wrote in an op-ed for the *New York Times* just before the publication of *Woman's Estate*, "which is different from that of the father's".[110] What is most striking about this re-evaluation of the role of the mother is the ways that it brought Mitchell closer to that sharp dividing line between 'nature' and 'culture' that second-wave theory, and her own earlier works, had erected.[111] We usually presume that the evolution of feminist theory, especially throughout the late 1970s and 1980s and especially under the influence of "French theories" like Lacanian post-structuralism, took feminists further away from "essentialisms" of the body and material reality.[112] Mitchell had always located women's oppression in ideology and the superstructure, and in her past work she therefore had hived off the biological from the social and focused on the latter as the site of revolution. The turn to the role of mother as primary caregiver and nurturer was thus a shift, for Mitchell, into uncharted terrain.s

Linked to her deepening engagement with psychoanalysis, especially by early readings of Lacan, Mitchell began to see "nature" and "culture" as mutually constituted, rather than binary opposites. In her article for the *Times*, she suggested that the "human order is, quite simply, the response of human beings to the natural conditions of their existence – whether this is wind, rain, barren soil, or the human body itself".[113] This was incredibly useful for an evolving theory of women's oppression that wanted to understand why women everywhere were oppressed, though everywhere differently so. Women's place as mothers was a cultural response to a

[110] Juliet Mitchell, "What is Woman?: I", *New York Times*, Dec 13, 1971, p. 39.
[111] C.f. Shira Tarrant, *When Sex Became Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
[112] Of course, even this is to assume that such 'essentialism' took only one form. There is a crucial difference between arguments like Simone de Beauvoir or Shulamith Firestone, who saw women as beholden by childbirth and thus potentially liberated by contraception technology or surrogacy, and the strictest materialist feminists, who felt that women's confinement within the bourgeois family was a confluence of the rise of private property and childbearing. These differences would have fundamental consequences for how each strand of their would confront, and evolve from, charges of 'essentialism'.
[113] Juliet Mitchell, "What is Woman?: I", *New York Times*, Dec 13, 1971, p. 39.

"natural condition", which encompassed both genitalia and childbearing capacity, and thus the natural condition could potentially be a cause of oppression and still a site of cultural change. In light of this, Mitchell offered a new restatement of the utility of psychoanalysis for feminism, arguing that it offered a social interpretation of the body, and it was that interpretation upon which people acted. Psychoanalysis, she said in a lecture in honour of Marie Stopes, is "the way that the anatomical male/female data (with all its uncertainties) is mentally lived; the way the psychical data, the clitoris/vagina/penis, is phantasized and experienced, the way these are lived in peoples' heads and in their experiences".[114] Of course, these conclusions arose directly from Mitchell's engagement with Lacan and Althusser. However, the question that feminism demanded made this engagement more complicated. If biology is then lived as ideology, in the head, how did a particular vision of the body, the association between anatomy and gender, and thus between anatomy and power, take place?

In the attempt to answer that question, Mitchell considered anew the mother's body, the conditions of childbirth, the function of the father and arrived at nothing less than a new understanding of the sexes themselves. In that Mary Stopes lecture, given in May of 1972, Mitchell laid out another version of the Oedipus complex in which her conclusions had changed significantly. As before, she saw the bond between mother and child as the primary relationship. But the nature of this bond was no longer one of simple unity of mother and child. Instead, Mitchell saw a new dynamism and foregrounded its sexual quality. Children, she said, "in this initial stage are clearly in an active and passive relationship to their mother" and, through this process, gradually begin to "forge their own identity".[115] By dating separation of

[114] 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.
[115] Juliet Mitchell "The Second Marie Stopes Memorial Lecture, Female Sexuality, Juliet Mitchell, Given in the University of York on 13 March 1972" p. 191

mother and child to before the Oedipal moment, Mitchell played down the father's intervention accordingly. Instead, both children come to be gradually aware of the father's greater power and slowly shift their feelings toward the mother. But these feelings, which represented a meeting point between the child's 'immediate situation' and a 'cultural imperative' against incest, had to be reconfigured differently for each sex:

> "At first both boy and girl have identified with the mother and both have taken her as an object of their active relation with her. But gradually the girl must intensify the aspect of identification and the boy must abandon it and pursue only the object relation. To put the implications of this in an over-simplified way: identification is more associated with passivity, and taking another object with activity. So here begin, 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"[116]

The fact that Mitchell had specified the nature of the "unformed" human and its relationship with its mother therefore had significant effects on Mitchell's understanding of the Oedipus complex itself. The *process* by which one's sexuality was re-directed, which Mitchell now defined with relation to 'identification' and 'object-relation', was now a part of the allocation of power between men and women. Rather than just a response to self-evident power relations of mother and father, the process replicated and endorsed social roles. Equally important was her new emphasis on the relationship between 'male', 'masculine', and 'active', and 'female', 'feminine', and 'passive'. She had begun to isolate the features of sexual difference as well as to try and specify how they came to be interconnected. The Oedipus complex was much more than a moment, therefore, in which girls learned they must emulate their mothers and so become women, or boys their fathers. Rather, the Oedipus complex was the moment that made boys and girls masculine or feminine, active or passive, and thus made them who they are.

[116] "Mitchell "The Second Marie Stopes Memorial Lecture", p. 193

This version of the Oedipus complex also involved a radical new account of family in relation to patriarchy. Where before, family was a sphere that women had to escape, that limited and distorted them, now both men and women gained their fundamental definition, and fundamental roles, within the family sphere. Mothers and fathers were functional roles, but they were also fundamentally relationships of power. "Each child has to learn to be part of patriarchal society", she wrote, "and this learning is acquired from the moment of birth into the family in the particular ethnic, social group into which the child is inserted".[117] The family, in this telling, is the primary social institution, the one that shapes the social forms that follow from it. The family structure "repeats the larger asymmetrical patriarchal culture into which we are inserted".[118] The importance in Mitchell's analysis, now, was not simply the 'ideas' of men and women, but the roles and the functions that they served in creating and reproducing society. Mitchell's analysis became primarily concerned with the family as the site of society writ large. Her analysis had shifted from the ideology of family, to the structure of kinship.

Crucial to this new interpretation was Mitchell's "discovery" of the unconscious. As we have seen, Mitchell's earliest understandings of the unconscious followed Althusser in seeing it as a simple repository of cultural laws, meaning the unconscious was thus synonymous with 'the misrecognised', 'the mystified', or simply 'the unconsidered'. Now, in 1972, she began her discussion of psychoanalysis with an extended discussion of the 'unconscious', "this land the confluence of biology, the historical and the immediate accidental".[119] These three components, she wrote, were often better known as the "ego, super-ego, and the id" and she suggested that sexual difference was determined by the meeting of these three elements under the natural sexual drives, "our cultural heritage of attitudes towards men and women of different roles and

[117] Juliet Mitchell, "Socialist Scholars Speech", p. 12
[118] Mitchell "Socialist scholars speech", p. 15
[119] Mitchell "The Second Marie Stopes Memorial Lecture", p. 185.

actions", and the immediate experiences of each individual, namely the primary relationship the child has with the mother. It was implicitly under the banner of the unconscious, with these three different realms, that Mitchell connected the sexual dynamics of active and passive, the social expectations that linked them to 'masculine' and 'feminine, and the incidental effects of the Oedipus complex within the nuclear family that instilled active-masculine and passive-feminine in young boys and girls.

Mitchell's discovery of the unconscious, and her differentiation of it from conscious thought, was clearly derived to her immersion in Freud's oeuvre, and she now quoted extensive passages from new texts that, on the surface level, were unrelated to sexual difference. But it was also fundamentally indebted to her reflections on the pre-Oedipal mother and child relationship and therefore her attempt to read the most famous theorist of this pre-conscious period: Melanie Klein. For Mitchell, Klein's work foregrounded the dynamism of children's engagement with the world and, equally important, restored the particular difficulty and lasting implications of the little girl's turn toward the father, which could be underplayed in that work by Althusser and Lacan that presumed the difficulty of the moment for children generally.[120] But Klein's highly technical approach also provided new terms, like "death drive" or "ego, super-ego, id" that arguably helped Mitchell to better understand the unconscious and to further separate the 'unthought' from the 'unconscious'. In some ways, Klein was a sharp departure from the French Lacanian and Marxist tradition with which she was more accustomed, so it makes sense that reading that Klein helped to bring the difference of the unconscious to the fore. At the same time, the importance of motherhood and therefore of Klein to Mitchell's work is surprising. Mitchell had always read psychoanalysis as a science of patriarchy, and she was

[120] Michal Shapira, *The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 87-112.

becoming increasingly insistent on the importance of fathers, not of mothers, to a theory of women's liberation. She was always fiercely critical of the feminist object relations tradition, spearheaded by Nancy Chodorow and associated with Deborah Dinnerstein and Jessica Benjamin, that predominated in the United States, believing that it failed to recognise the unconscious and that its focus on childrearing was accordingly too "sociological".[121] Nor did Mitchell reference or quote the work of Object Relations theorists in her writings, a sign, perhaps, of the strength of Object Relations theory and its imbrication in politics and policy in Britain. Where Americans like Chodorow fled ego-psychology in favour of Klein and Winnicott, British feminists tended to be highly critical Winnicott or, worse, Bowlby and draw instead upon Freud himself.[122] Her understandings of the unconscious and the sexual difference would thus have their primary impact in the transformation of her interpretation of Althusser and Freud and the establishment of a feminist version of the two for Britain.[123] Though she was not quite sure how yet, Mitchell therefore used her new insights on repression, the unconscious, and sexual drives to better understand the Oedipus complex as the "forced march from primitive neonate to a cultured human adult".[124]

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Psychoanalysis and Feminism, published in 1974, explicated in the fullest terms yet why Mitchell believed Freud's psychoanalysis was pivotal for feminist theory and what that new

[121] This was a frequent critique. C.f. Parveen Adams, Elizabeth Cowie, "Feminine Sexuality: Interview with Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose', *M/F* no. 8 (1983), p. 5. See also Juliet Mitchell, "Introduction, 1999", *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A Radical Reassessment of Freudian Analysis* (New York: Basic Books, 2000 [1974]), pp. xv-xvi.
[122] On the US see: Mari Jo Buhle, *Feminism and its Discontents: A Century of Struggle with Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 240-279. A similar pattern was evident in Germany, where radical sexologists recovered Freud, who had been sidelined in the Federal Republic in the post-war years, for revolutionary purposes. See Dagmar Herzog, "What they desire they cannot love': Recovering Radical Freudianism in West German Sexology (1960-1980s), *Psychoanalysis and History*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2014), pp. 237-261.
[123] Enid Balint, "Enid Balint interviewed by Juliet Mitchell" in Juliet Mitchell, Michael Parsons, ed., Edith Balint *Before I was I: Psychoanalysis and the Imagination* (London: Free Association Books, 1993), pp. 221-236.
[124] Mitchell "The Second Marie Stopes Memorial Lecture", p. 185.

theory – a psychoanalytic explanation of women's oppression under patriarchy – might look like. She was concerned with the same questions that had preoccupied her since "Women: the Longest Revolution": why were women oppressed, why had they been so for so long, why had this oppression been forgotten and misunderstood, and what was the nature, experience, and origins of that oppression? Most important of these was a question whose significance had only gained in stature throughout the Women's Liberation Movement: what were women? To answer these questions, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* drew on the major theoretical insights she had gleaned over the course of four years of serious study and inquiry, namely, the ways that ideology and the social order was lived (Althusser), the structural role of the father/Phallus within patriarchal systems (Lacan), and the legacies and importance of the Oedipus complex and the unconscious for the determination of sexual difference (Freud).

The book was divided into three sections. In the first, Mitchell laid out her interpretation of Freud's entire opus, beginning with the discovery of the unconscious, through to his findings on the ego, superego and id, narcissism, penis envy, and the castration complex, before turning to a chapter on "The Making of a Lady", in which each of these phenomena coalesced to explain how little boys and girls were formed from "animal", bisexual children. The second section, often forgotten but by far the lengthiest, assessed the treatment of the unconscious, gender, and the sexuality in the work of Wilhelm Reich, RD Laing, and every major post-war feminist thinker from Simone de Beauvoir to Betty Friedman, Eva Figes, Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millett, and Germaine Greer.[125] This critical literature review, brilliant in its comprehension, used these authors as a familiar starting point in order to further elaborate Freud's central

[125] Mitchell discusses the minimal response to this middle section, which was in early drafts the entire centerpiece of the book, in her introduction to the new edition in 2000, in which the title was revealingly changed from *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women* to *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A Radical Reassessment of Freudian Analysis* (New York: Basic Books, 2000 [1974]). See Juliet Mitchell, "Introduction, 1999", pp. xv-xvi.

concepts, especially the unconscious, and to highlight how much was lost when they were not taken into account. Mitchell closed with a heroic final argument "The Holy Family", so named after Marx's 'holy bestial family', to bring her insights on the "making of a lady' into conversation with Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan, and Karl Marx to elaborate a political theory that could finally explain how women's oppression functioned at once historically and structurally.

In her interpretation of Freud, as in her initial approach years before, Mitchell directly adopted Althusser's classification of psychoanalysis as a science. The existence of the unconscious, she explained, was not a matter of belief or disbelief, truth or untruth, because "the laws by which he claimed it operated can be shown to have an internal consistency".[126] This 'internal consistency' was crucial for Mitchell's ingenious reading of Freud's collected works. Though her account narrated Freud's developments and findings chronologically, she carefully distinguished between those findings that were 'consistent' with the laws of psychoanalytic science and those that were not and thus later discarded. Just like the language of science gave Althusser the tools to conduct a heterodox reading of Marx, so too did it Mitchell offer a historically flexible reconstruction of psychoanalysis – one that was both a complete science and continually refined. Nowhere was this more important than in Mitchell's re-reading of the crucial notions of 'instinct' and 'drive', 'active' and 'passive'. In words that replicated almost identically Althusser's discussion of the 'horizons of the ideological world' of concepts in "Freud and Lacan", Mitchell argued that Freud had merely "borrowed" words from biological science and, though he was "champing at the bit of enforced restriction", used the scientific words for offer wholly ideas. [127] Thus, she concluded that even when Freud's early

[126] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 6
[127] Althusser, "Freud and Lacan", p. 52; *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 44.

works had written 'masculine' or 'instinct', what he had really meant was 'active' or 'drive'. "Freud's sexual vocabulary did not change", she said, but "the notions they described, to some extent, did so".[128] Based on this understanding of 'consistency' of scientific laws, Mitchell drew together Freud's later conclusions and his earliest discoveries, and especially his case studies, into one self-sufficient whole. His final arguments could therefore be used to illuminate the substance of the earliest, and richest, case studies. Therefore, it mattered not that Freud had once written of 'male' and 'female' and the 'instinct', to ask "what is woman?": the early writings could be read as if Freud had always been describing 'active' and 'passive', and 'how does the feminine come to be?'.

The reconfiguration of psychoanalysis as science was also linked to Mitchell's Althusserian connection between ideology, psychoanalysis, and the "inheritance and acquisition of the human order".[129] She thus agreed with Althusser, much more strongly than she had in 1970, that Freud was describing a set of laws and processes that had operated throughout all of human history. In light of her new conviction about the universal status of the unconscious, Mitchell relegated a planned opening chapter on Freud's context in fin de siècle Vienna, once so central to her interpretation of his 'radical' though restricted nature, to a post-script, which was explicitly intended to appease critics rather than to enhance her analysis.[130] She also placed new emphasis on Freud's whole body of work, arguing that feminists could not simply use the essays that explicitly pertained to women but instead had to address the theory as a whole, particularly "the nature of unconscious mental life and the particular laws that govern its behaviour and secondly, the meaning of sexuality in human life".[131]

[128] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 44
[129] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, pp. 401-2.
[130] Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, "Preface", xvi-ii.
[131] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 5.

It was here, in her explication of Freud's general account of the unconscious and sexuality, that Mitchell radically extended Althusser's analysis and offered her own an explanation for how human's internalised the laws of the social order around them.[132] Repression, she explained, was the key dynamic. 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".[133] Through this process, the individual's desires, their response to the social prohibition, and the prohibition itself were all imbibed into the unconscious. Here, again, her analysis revealed the three-part structure central to her account of the unconscious in the Marie Stopes lecture: the biological, the social-historical, and the incidental-individual. That middle category, the social-historical prohibition, was the realm of Althusser's the Law of Order. This same ternary structure was replicated in Mitchell's analysis of the development of the unconscious itself. Drawing directly on Lacan's account of the 'mirror stage', she explained that the young pre-Oedipal child began first to identify with its own image in the mirror, as though the image were another. By "constituting itself in that desired image", and replicating the patterns of the mirror reflection, the child gradually developed an ego – the incidental component of the self.[134] As the child gradually came to recognise and understand social laws, still before the Oedipal phase had begun, it began to transform this attachment into an identification "of what he would like to be – an ideal self or an ego ideal".[135] Because this 'ideal' was defined by social expectations and laws, of which the child was "flutteringly" but not fully cognisant, this 'super-ego' was the

[132] Althusser was increasingly skeptical of the value of the 'unconscious', at least as a concept to describe ideology, and, in his note to the editors of the New Left Review in 1969, he described "Freud and Lacan" as a "polemic" and regretted a number of its limitations. His own work had moved in different directions, famously toward the "interpellation" of ideology. Mitchell never adopted these terms. See "NLR Editors, "Editorial Note on 'Freud and Lacan'", Vol 55, May/June 1969, p. 48.
[133] Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 53, 10.
[134] Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 39.
[135] Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 35.

social-historical, the realm of conformity and ideology. Together with the biological drives – the id – the child's unconscious was thus formed. But in both these processes – repression and the creation of the unconscious – the three 'realms' of biological, socio-historical, and incidental were not equal. The socio-historical, which determined how to behave and mandated when to repress, ruled supreme. The child, she wrote, "has to struggle to establish its own individual ego, harmoniously and disharmoniously, in the order of the human society that expresses itself in the unconscious".[136] All children learned to recognise themselves and others in relationship to the ideals and expectations of the world around them: because these expectations were united within each "order of the human society", the unconscious was collective, and all psyches, however individual they seemed to be, are social.

It was in the context of this "struggle" that Mitchell ventured her new, and final, account of how sexual difference came into being. The two central events of this account remained the castration complex, which marked the entry of the Phallus, and the Oedipus complex. But both events were fundamentally transformed by her understanding of the unconscious, the social order, and repression. Young children are born bisexual, Mitchell claimed, meaning that they are born with both active and passive drives. "Children want everything", she explained, "just as the girl will wait for her clitoris to grow into penile activity, so the boy will wait till he can have a baby".[137] This desire is structured by the desire of the mother, a desire exacerbated as the child begins to realize that they are not self-sufficient and that something is thus 'missing'. Though this realisation is at first 'natural', associated with the coming and going of the mother's breast and the recognition of another image in the mirror, it is transformed by fear of castration. This castration complex – the entry of the Phallus which determined that boys

[136] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 391.
[137] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 25

cannot have babies and girls cannot have a penis – was the child's first conscious recognition of the laws that govern and order society. [138] It is in this context, Mitchell explained, that the child comes to realize that within patriarchal society it is only the Phallus that will win them the desired mother. Caught between desire and fear of this Phallus and their new recognition that this incestuous desire is forbidden, the child represses its feelings and, as the first act of repression, absorbs the power of the Phallus and the laws of society into their unconscious. [139]

But Mitchell also argued that the castration complex, as precursor to the Oedipus complex, marked young children in different ways. The boy fears the Phallus, he fears loss of his penis. The girl, by contrast, must realise that she does not have one in the first place. Where the boy loses the mother, but can expect to one day have another like her, the girl loses both her mother and any hope that she might one day possess a Phallus and win a mother in the future. 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".[140] Thus, with an "act of massive of repression", the girl transfers her active aims for the mother into the passive aims of being wanted by the father instead, with the expectation that he can provide her with a Phallus and, especially, a baby who has a phallus. The effects of this repression on the female personality, and on the female capacity for political action, are multitude. But most importantly, by transforming her aims into passive ones, the destiny of the little girl is thus not only to be female in the second status but also to be a mother. The supremacy of the Phallus set the girl on the path to motherhood, to a future of secondary status, and to her place in ensuring the reproduction of all social roles.

[138] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, 25
[139] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 82.
[140] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 96

In her analysis, Mitchell was rigorous in dividing the unconscious, and the processes by which it was created, from sexual difference itself. Repression, division of the self, the unconscious were all sexless. All these processes were common to both children, and all adults. Prior to the castration and Oedipus complexes, all children have active and passive aims, all children love the mother, all children have diverse fears and losses. Even in the face of the Phallus, boys and girls both repress their desire for their mother and thus absorb the same social law. It is only the effect of the law, which is, in other words, only the effect of patriarchal society, which resulted in the difference of boys and girls. "Human culture", she wrote, "subjects all to the law of the father in whose name the boy and the girl take up their different destinies".[141] This law of the father is the moment of repression in which desire, social law, fear, and the Phallus all collide and are submerged into the unconscious. Because this repression contained both the law and the response to the law, and the response had to differ for boys and girls, universal unconscious processes began to differ by sex. From there, desire, social destiny and especially roles as husband, wife, mother, father became firmly set.

Psychoanalysis and Feminism thus read the castration and Oedipal complex as a "structural" moment, rather than a historical or iterative one, in which society was inaugurated within the individual. Individual experiences, she argued, were largely unimportant. Rather, because the unconscious functioned with relation to shared social laws, the adult would remember and reconstitute the moment in light of the social expectations. Using Freud's famous case studies, she demonstrated that Wolf Man's nursemaid became 'mother', and Dorr's desire for Mrs K was buried beneath her expected desire for her father. Much like her careful distinction between "unconscious processes" and their "different effects" for boys and girls, Mitchell cited these cases as examples of the fact that roles and functions counted for

[141] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, 119

more than the people who fulfilled them. "The Oedipus complex is not a set of *attitudes* to other people", she wrote, "but a pattern of relationships between a set of places – actually occupied or otherwise".[142] As a result, we might understand this "pattern" in two ways. On the one hand, the positions of 'father', 'mother', 'Phallus' within the Oedipus complex could be occupied by any individual, male or female or otherwise, as long as the relationship between each "place" was identical. The occupants of each position could change – the nursemaid could be the 'mother' in the case of the Wolf Man – but the result would be the same, because the law was the same. But on the other hand, the law itself could change. In that account, there would remain repression, mother-attachment, and the creation of the unconscious. The effects, however, would be entirely different. The 'Phallus', in its essential function to denote power and laws, might not also denote patriarchy. "Hence", Mitchell concluded, "we can see why the unconscious, and with 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".[143] The challenge was to create that a political theory that could distinguish between the demands of all civilisation and the specific demands of this, patriarchal culture.

Mitchell was helped to explicate this careful structural argument through, and indeed derived part of her argument from, the work of Jacques Lacan and of Claude Lévi-Strauss. As Camille Robcis as demonstrated, Lévi-Strauss and Lacan developed a "structuralist social contract" that placed the exchange of women, the incest taboo, and the Oedipus complex as the inaugural events that transformed mankind from animals into humans, and thus created society.[144] Before these three events, men were animals. After, human, kinship and civilization

[142] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 64 Emphasis in original.
[143] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 381. Emphasis is my own.
[144] Camille Robcis, *The Law of Kinship: Anthropology, Psychoanalysis, and the Family in France*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), esp Chapter 2, "Kinship and the Structuralist Social Contract" pp. 61-101.

arose. This meant that the exchange of women and the Oedipus complex had qualities that were simultaneously animal and human, pre-social and post-social, pre-conscious and conscious, for they were the structural events that bound the transition from one stage to the other. The central device for both Lévi-Strauss and Lacan, by personal admission absent from Mitchell's analysis, was the transition from 'speech', sound, to 'language', the capacity to signify, and symbolize. If Lévi-Strauss argued this 'structural' event happened in the distant past of every society, Lacan extended this premise by arguing that it happened in miniature in every human child.

It was through this 'structuralist social contract' that Mitchell inserted sexual difference as a means to explain women's oppression.[145] Of course, keeping 'women's inequality' as an 'effect' of the transition to civilization, rather than a foundational premise of it, was a difficult task – especially when Lévi-Strauss had posited the exchange of women, and therefore the distinction between the sexes, as a foundational component in pre-social life. To answer this puzzle, Mitchell turned Lévi-Strauss and Lacan's own theory back upon themselves. "If, as is the case, it is empirically proven that it is *always* men who exchange women, then, though the obverse is hypothetically possible", she wrote, "there must be available a *theoretical* explanation of why it does not happen".[146] In order to provide this theoretical explanation, Mitchell looked to the function of this exchange. The exchange of women, she concluded, was about exogamy: the creation of society was founded not on women but exogamy. The exchange of women was therefore born of the designation of differences, much like the child's recognition of the self in the mirror, the child's differentiation of itself from the mother, and, indeed, the family's distinction of itself from families. The importance was the mark of

[145] Of course, sexual difference was central for Lacan as well, though the problem for Mitchell was to make women's secondary status an effect of the structure, rather than central to it. Lacan would have argued that sexual difference, a fundamental element of the Oedipus complex, was non-negotiable feature of the structural shift.
[146] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 372.

difference, the intervention of a "third term". Thus, she concluded that, though "exchange" was essential, "exchange of women" was not. "Ultimately what is important, then", she said, "is some legally established method of exchange and a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate relationships – within these terms, what the law establishes goes, but its expression can be extremely variable".[147] She applied this same logic to Lacan. Lacan, in her reading, made the "Symbolic", which again she read as the social order rather than a relation of meaning, coextensive with the father. Drawing on work by Maud Mannoni, she instead concluded that "this symbolic dimension is only something the father represents, it is not his exclusively".[148] Mitchell thus used the "structuralist social contract" as laid out by Lacan and Lévi-Strauss to distinguish between that which was necessary for society to function - the universal - and that which was secondary - patriarchal and particular. She then read this distinction, between universal structures and their present expression, back into her account of Freud, distinguishing Freud's laws of the unconscious from the patriarchal laws that has thus far always imparted them.

The problem, however, and the conclusion that distinguished Mitchell from many of her interlocutors on the marriage of psychoanalysis and feminism, was the unconscious.[149] The unconscious meant that the present Oedipus complex, in all its patriarchal 'discontents', was relived throughout each individual's life. The Oedipus complex, she concluded, was "how mankind 'think' their history…men *must* believe it happened if they are to live according to the

[147] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* p. 375
[148] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. This argument was further enforced by Mitchell's elaborate re-reading of *Totem and Taboo*, which focused on the fact that the law of the father was actually represented by the dead father, meaning that none could actually possess the phallus.
[149] Here, I am referring especially to Judith Butler's call for a "post-structural definition of kinship", where she refers to Mitchell's belief in the "primordial law" of incest and therefore heterosexual kinship as exemplifying one of the limits of Lacanian and structuralist feminist theory. Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 19, 75. See also the discussion of Mitchell and Gayle Rubin below.

dictates of society".[150] Each person was thus destined to act under existing social laws. Even for the young child, born without an unconscious and initially free from those social laws, the order lay in wait. This understanding of the unconscious led Mitchell to reject the very search for origins that had driven Mitchell to Freud in the first place. "It seems to me", she wrote, "that 'why did it happen' and 'historically when?' are both false questions".[151] Though it was precisely the longevity of oppression that had once driven her search for its origins, her path through ideology and psychoanalysis led her to the conclusion that oppression of women did not originate at a particular moment, but it was instead structural, repeated in every human and in every culture through the unconscious. "The questions that should, I think, be asked in place of these", she suggested, "are: how does it happen and when does it take place in our society?"[152]

This emphasis on the unconscious, and therefore the structural creation of sexual difference, posed particular problems for a theory of women's liberation. "If we identify patriarchy with human history", Mitchell admitted, "the solution to the question of the oppression of women at first seems far less accessible than if we were to explore other theories".[153] How, in other words, to combine historical materialism, premised after all on a dynamic of historical change, with structural patriarchy? The answer to this question also lay in Mitchell's careful relation between the functions of the family, and the how these functions were expressed in "our society". In an extremely complex, highly theoretical argument, Mitchell concluded that there was a contradiction, in the Althusserian sense, between the Oedipus complex and its manifestation within the biological nuclear family under modern

[150] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, pp. 366-7. Emphasis in original.
[151] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 364.
[152] *Psychoanaysis and Feminism*, p. 364.
[153] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 308.

capitalism. She argued that modern capitalism, through urbanisation and industrialisation, had weakened the need for exogamy whilst simultaneously endorsing the nuclear family as "the bourgeoisie's answer to the problem of reproduction".[154] Thus, where *Woman's estate* had seen the nuclear family as a promise of control extended to the working class amidst the turmoil and instability of industrialisation, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* argued the opposite. The nuclear family was an ideological remnant of the need for exogamy, one that thus existed in tension with capitalism itself. This tension was further compounded by the fact that the biological nuclear family placed emphatic stress on the very prohibition, incest, that the Oedipus complex was intended to supress. The intersection of modern capitalism and patriarchal ideology of the nuclear family were thus in contradiction. The "differentiating instance between man and beast", by which she meant the Oedipus complex and the taboo on incest, "may have become 'unsuitable' for the particular social form in which it is today expressed".[155]

Mitchell's forecast of change and revolution was the direct product of reflections that dated back to 1966, and to "Women: the Longest Revolution". In both that essay and *Psychoanalysis and Feminism,* the dynamic of change was the dialectic of contradiction within ideology and the superstructure and the potentially revolutionary conditions this contradiction created. *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* marked a drastic extension of her previous argument. Where "Women: the Longest Revolution" had posited a contradiction between 'ideology' and 'practice', *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* used the "structuralist social contract" in order to locate the contradiction between the demands of a structure and its particular expression. "It is the contradiction between the internalized law of patriarchal human order described by Freud as the Oedipus complex", Mitchell wrote, referring to the law of exogamy and differentiation,

[154] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 379
[155] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 380.

"and its embodiment in the nuclear family that is significant".[156] On one level, Mitchell had relocated the site of contradiction. But she had also changed its nature. By locating the origins of the contradiction, and the potential for change, within the kinship structure, she had made kinship, not the economic base, the potential cause of revolutionary transformed. The laws that determined the organization of kinship, and thus the universal organization of all human society, were not in economic in the slightest: only the present expression, with the nuclear family as born of modern capitalism, was economically determined. For a Marxist this was, of course, an enormous shift, one necessitated by the demand that feminism explain women's oppression under pre-capitalist and capitalist formations. *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* thus brought together all of Mitchell's work over seven years – the fictions that unite the family as a unity, the importance of kinship structures, the nature of ideology as mystification, the creation of the unconscious in relation to the social order, and contradiction as the fundamental dynamic of historical change – in order to erect an argument that took into cognizance the longevity of patriarchy, that accounted for its reproduction, and that established that conditions were ripe for revolutionary transformation.

From the process of researching, reading for, and writing *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Juliet Mitchell emerged with a new and radical theory of sexual difference, and therefore of women's oppression. She argued that the Oedipus complex, a moment of socialization in which children assumed their expected place within society, had the effect of dividing young children into boys and girls by their relation to the primary symbol of social organization, which, in patriarchal society, was the phallus. This division was at once social, demanding that children assume particular role, and psychological, for it created particular desires and characteristics appropriate to one's future position in society. Though it was division that mutually shaped the

[156] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 413.

young boy and the young girl, as both had to repress the active or passive drives that were accorded to its counterpart, this division under patriarchy that marked girls all the more, due to the demand that they assume the inferior position from which any human naturally shied. This characterisation of masculine and feminine, as opposed to male and female, was an intellectual revelation, for it allowed Mitchell to reassert the dynamic of struggle central to any Marxist account without positioning men as the active perpetrator of oppression. Instead, she demonstrated that sexual difference was about social organisation and a process "of the production of typicality, of 'ideality'" that was always incomplete and assumed only with great difficulty".[157] This distinction between 'ideality', or 'ideology', and its assumption was driven by Mitchell's discovery of and conversion to the unconscious, leading her to depart, in some ways, from Althusser's definition of social Order even as she retained his great faith in the world outside ideological institutions and the ability for true science to discover them.[158] The other central innovation of *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* was its reassertion of the centrality of kinship structures into this shifting relation of material reality and ideological superstructure. By locating this moment of 'humanisation', and therefore the moment in which a society was reproduced in its members, within the family, Mitchell transformed the nature of the 'private sphere' for Marxist theory. Kinship structures were, in Mitchell's account, a total social structure that predated capitalism and determined it in significant ways, for the positions that individuals assumed within families had fundamental consequences for patriarchy and for capitalism. This account of sexual difference and kinship thus operated simultaneously at the level of the individual, at the level of each nuclear family, within late capitalist society, and within all civilisations in history.

[157] *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 112.
[158] This was, of course, Derrida's great critique of Althusser, and indeed a faith that has perplexed many theorists and historians after the post-structural turn. See Barings, *The Young Derrida*.

To understand the parameters and dynamics as well as the influence of Mitchell's theory of sexual difference, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* can be usefully contrasted to Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women", the great feminist text that also brought together Lacanian psychoanalysis with Levi-Strauss' anthropology and Althusserian Marxism in order to seek a new account of the origins of the oppression of women and the potential conditions for their liberation. Rubin's article, written when she was just an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, was almost discarded after Mitchell published *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, before being published in an influential anthropological anthology *Toward an Anthropology of Women* in 1975.[159] It is revealing that many of Mitchell's staunchest critics, including Judith Butler and Joan Scott, cite Rubin's article as a central influence, for where Mitchell offers an account of subject positions and social laws, Rubin uses almost identical texts to understand what she labelled the "sex-gender system": "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied".[160] Rubin's "sex-gender system" thus foregrounded the flexibility which societies could arrange sexual and social functions, a flexibility that was belied in Mitchell's argument by her eventual turn to structuralism and especially to the unconscious.[161] The most important difference between Mitchell and Rubin, however, is that Rubin read the Oedipus complex and the incest taboo as injunctions to heterosexuality, while Mitchell rendered sexual object choice an effect of the arrangement of active and passive drives, an arrangement determined by power and the Phallus. This fundamental difference was the result, for both

[159] Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin, "Sexual Traffic: Interview with Gayle Rubin by Judith Butler" in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 278.
[160] Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex", *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 34
[161] I would argue that this flexibility is one reasons why American feminists indebted to Foucault have tended to turn toward Rubin, while British feminists, whose exposure to Foucault often post-dated to their exposure to Freud, were often more likely to see a way by which to combine Foucault, as a theory of power-knowledge, and Freud, as a theory of subjectivity and instability, and thus bypassed Foucault's broader critique of psychoanalysis.

Rubin and Mitchell, of divergent interpretations of the central mother-child-father relationship. Rubin argued that the sacralization of the phallus was direct the result of a child's desire for the mother. If the father possessed the mother because he had a penis, all children desired the penis to capture the mother. Heterosexuality being thus to blame, Rubin argued flexible childrearing could consequently alter the structure of the Oedipus complex and of women's oppression. Mitchell, by contrast, was more prone to read the family as a social institution that replicated larger social forms and that inaugurated the social structure in miniature in the child. Combined with her emphasis on the unconscious, which was absent in Rubin's account, Mitchell felt that changes in individual families would have less effect than might be hoped. Indeed, this sharp difference is precisely why, though they advanced highly similar arguments and drew on the same nexus of theorists, Rubin's account is remembered in terms of the 'sex-gender system', while Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* has tended to be read as an argument about the unconscious, and therefore sexual difference.

If Rubin's "The Traffic and Women" points towards the peculiarities and emphases of Mitchell's account of sexual difference, Laura Mulvey's famous essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" can offer a sense of the opposite: the ways that notions of sexual difference developed within the History Group and elaborated by Mitchell have provided a foundation for rethinking disciplines and sexual difference.[162] Mulvey first wrote "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" around the time that Mitchell published *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, drawing on ideas that both had discussed together within the confines of the History Group. But Mulevy didn't publish the essay until 1975, when film journal *Screen* was regenerating into a

[162] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (1975), pp. 6-18.

hub for psychoanalytic and semiotic theory and her work had a ready-made captive audience.[163] In htat essay, Mulvey coined the now ubiquitous term 'the male gaze' to refer to the psychoanalytic dynamics of positioning and identification within the cinema. This gaze, Mitchell argued, structured relations between characters on the screen, between the audience and the film, and between the film and broader social laws and structures. The central dynamic , just as for Mitchell's account of sexual difference, was the ways that characters, audience, and society were positioned as active or passive, masculine or feminine. Mulvey fundamentally extended Mitchell's analysis, too, by using new Freudian terms like fantasy and fetish in order to better understand the allure and enchantment of the cinema and, by implication, the social order. Though these were by definition sexual dynamics, they were, again like in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, constituted by the ways they affirmed active or passive positions: in both analyses, was thus not the direction or object the sexual drive that mattered, but its nature. Most importantly, both Mulvey and Mitchell were fundamentally concerned with non-negotiable social laws and structures against which all, whether children or cinema viewers, had to define themselves. For this reason, criticisms that Mulvey has ignored the multiplicity subjectivities or 'gazes' have missed Mulvey's, and by extension Mitchell's, point: as Jacqueline Rose, Mulvey and Mitchell's close friend and collaborator, has since written, "the pulse of the cinema" is "who it allows – or rather invites – you to be".[164] The cinema for Mulvey thus functioned in an identical manner to Mitchell's kinship structure. Both cinema and

[163] *Screen* was deeply influential for a number of future lights of feminist literary and film theory, including Mary Kelly, Toril Moi, Jacqueline Rose, Elisabeth Cowie, Rosalind Coward, and Joan Copjec. Mitchell and the History Group's influence could thus be followed almost directly into *Screen*, though her work was not, of course, the only reason for the predominance of psychoanalysis or feminism in its pages.

[164] 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.

kinship 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. It was thus the Law, and the positions that it created, that determined normality, and sexual difference.

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Psychoanalysis and feminism incited a storm of controversy when it was released. Reviews abounded, and discussions fixated on its account of making of boys and girls, the centrality of the unconscious, and, especially within English feminism, the place of history within its analysis. The debate lasted well into the 1980s, and its terms also filtered into broader discussions on the utility of 'patriarchy', the sixth Women's Liberation Movement demand on 'the right to choose your own sexuality', and on the nature of Thatcherism. Mitchell's peers from the History Group leapt to her defence, and many of them wrote the major reviews and responses to the text in the biggest British history journals: the Lacan Reading Group in *New Left Review*, Rosalind Delmar in *Red Rag*, Margaret Walters in *Spare Rib* and in 1982, in response to a long analysis and critique of psychoanalysis by Elizabeth Wilson, Jacqueline Rose in *Feminist Review*.

These reviews indicate the ways that discussions of psychoanalysis had been moving within Mitchell's own circle, and also how *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* was making its impact. To the last, each review foregrounded Mitchell's as an account of the instability of sexual difference, the difficulty of femininity under a patriarchal order, and the importance of the struggle between masculinity and femininity on an individual and social level. "Psychoanalysis becomes one of the last places in our culture where it is recognised", Jacqueline Rose wrote in her much celebrated defence of psychoanalysis and of Mitchell, "that

most women do not painlessly slip into their roles as women, if they do at all".[165] Mitchell herself was also moving in this direction, she planned to write a book on hysteria that would also explore the nature of love and sexuality for men and women, an account which, if the related pages in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* are anything to go by, would have been partly an analysis of the difficulties and distortions of demanded by passive femininity within a patriarchal culture. 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 translations of "French feminism" and 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 concern with the relationship between the individual and the social order, the primacy of sexual difference within 'humanization', and an emphasis on the bodily as well as psychic nature of sexual difference remained crucial. It was in this form that Mitchell's psychoanalytic configuration of sexual difference, on the instability, fragility, and difficulty of the law of femininity and masculinity, made its mark in new accounts of working-class subjectivity, of witchcraft, of séances, of anthropological debates over patriarchy, of conservatism and femininity, of child-care and psychology in wartimes, and in biographies on figures as varied as Martin Luther and Mary Wollstonecraft.[166]

[165] Jacqueline Rose, "Femininity and Its Discontents", *Feminist Review*, No. 80 (2005 [1983]), p. 29.
[166] 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); Lyndal Roper, "Witchcraft and Fantasy in Early Modern Germany", *history workshop,* no. 32 (1991), pp. 19-43; Alex Owen, "The other voice: women, children

Was Mitchell's account of sexual difference an English phenomenon, was "sexual difference" England's answer to Joan Scott's "gender"? It is certainly true that many of the 'moves' that "gender" allowed historians to make – an intervention into politics, the end of the sequestering of "women's history", a concern with both men and women, a shift to ideology over experience – were also inherent in Mitchell's project. Mitchell's account did have a different analysis of the relationship between 'experience' and 'ideology', as she foregrounded the importance of subjectivity where Scott turned to epistemology, and was more centrally concerned with the individual and their relation to the social order. The "material" also never quite fell away in Mitchell's analysis, or in the psychoanalytic ones that followed, and many remained particularly interested in the relationship between femininity and the body in a way that Scott's 'gender' tended, by default, to rule out. For many years, Mitchell rejected the concept of 'gender' for this reason, arguing that it was sociological, that it was analytically imprecise, that it demoted the structural centrality of 'masculine' and 'feminine' in favour of their 'symbolic value'. Scott, too, assessed an account of 'sexual difference' and psychoanalysis that was evidently Mitchell's in "Gender: a Useful Category of Analysis?" and found it too structural, too ahistorical, too functional and inflexible. In recent years, however, Mitchell and Scott have begun to reconsider their original stances. Mitchell adopted 'gender' in her 2003 book *Siblings: Sex and Violence*, attributing her change of heart directly to Scott's famous article, while in *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, Scott returned to sexual difference and

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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) and more explicitly Alison Light, " 'Returning to Manderley': Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality, and Class", *Feminist Review*, No 16 (Summer, 1984), p. 9; Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and Mother* (London: Virago, 1983) and explicitly on the provocation of Mitchell for that book Denis Riley, "Reflections in the Archive", *History Workshop,* No. 44 (Autumn 1997), P. 239; Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (London: The Bodley Head, 2016); Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

offered an argument in its favour. Most revealing, however, is the fact that both women have primarily integrated the alternate concept, so long rejected, into their original projects: gender, for Mitchell, represents the pre-Oedipal and non-hierarchical relationship between boys and girls to distinguish from the hierarchies and conflict described by 'sexual difference', Scott's definition of 'sexual difference' as the "unresolvable" attempt "to assign fixed meaning to that which ultimately cannot be fixed", is not that far from her first description of gender as "empty and overflowing categories".[167] With the adoption of new terminologies comes the specification of those old projects, and the concerns and questions presumed long forgotten, buried in a former feminist wave, linger on.

[167] Scott, *Fantasy of Feminist History*, p. 5; Joan W Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis", p. 1074.