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Feminism and the Technological Age

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FEMINISM AND THE TECHNOLOGICAL AGE

Anna Yeatman

Abstract   Feminism advocates for the inclusion of women within the modern economy, but this has implicated feminism in a hyper-capitalist and instrumental mode of organising social life. Feminism has helped to legitimise the ubiquitous reach of this regime into all areas of social life, even parenting. Feminism can learn from Heidegger's proposition that in questioning modern technology we may open up a way of coming into a free relationship with it—to be open to the divinity of living beings and things. Jessica Benjamin's account of the relationship between the mother and her infant in terms of intersubjectivity seems to fit Heidegger's proposition for it highlights a dynamic and receptive exchange between two unique living beings. The question for feminism at this time is: how can it own its complicity with modern technology while opening up its distinctive contribution to finding a way of coming into a free relationship with it?

Introduction

Contemporary feminism cannot escape an unhappy state of co-option in relation to the combined forces of a hyper-capitalism and modern technology. Where the former subjects everyone and everything to an instrumental logic of commodification, the latter exemplifies a distinctively modern fantasy of control. This is the fantasy suggested in the desire to substitute that which humans can make for reality itself, as Hannah Arendt (1958, 2–3) puts it. It is what Heidegger calls 'the sheer Will to Will', 'the quest of power for its own sake' and it is the hallmark of the technological era (Zimmerman 2006, 302).[1] Arendt sees such hubris as an attempt to escape our dependence on an 'earthly nature' that connects us to other creaturely beings who like us need air to breathe, water to drink and the fruit of the earth to eat. Here Arendt is in tune with Jessica Benjamin's (1988) proposition that domination arises out of the subject's need to deny his (or her) dependence, a need that is expressed as an ideal of self-sufficiency. When the human gift of making (*poiēsis*) is shaped by this project of omnipotence, its possibilities for a creative and receptive adaptation to phenomena that in some fundamental way conserves them are lost; the maker is reduced to the subjective orientation of control, and 'the product' is reduced to something that is merely a resource, that once used up, is discarded.

While the complicity of feminism in modern technology (for example, a triumphalist neo-liberal feminism, and perhaps also, feminist constructivism) cannot be denied, it is also the case that feminism has been loyal to women's distinctive ontological responsibility for 'care'. The question for feminism has been how can it rethink this loyalty in such a way that women can enjoy a freedom to enter into a reciprocally creative *intersubjective* relationship with their children, and with men (their fathers, brothers, friends and sometime partners). This is the question that defines Jessica Benjamin's feminist project.

She explores the promise of feminism in developing a societal ethic of intersubjectivity. Such an opening occurs only by means of feminism's practical working through the structure of domination which is expressed as a series of dualisms where the dominant term (the self-sufficient subject) is unable to acknowledge his likeness to the term that is repudiated because it is made to exemplify all that self-sufficiency cannot accommodate. Just as Heidegger suggests that we can develop a free relationship with technology only if we recover the essence of technology as something other than an anthropocentric will to power, Benjamin suggests that we can differentiate the ideas of self-sufficiency and genuine individual autonomy only if we experimentally practise living our lives in ways that are not structured by gender polarity. Benjamin argues that 'the power of the ideal of a self-sufficient individuality' 'is the chief manifestation of male hegemony, far more pervasive than overtly authoritarian forms of male domination', and '[d]espite the appearance of gender neutrality and the freedom to be whatever we like, gender polarity persists' (Benjamin 1988, 172).

In what follows, I pursue these lines of thought in the spirit of enquiry rather than of didactic analysis. My intention is twofold: first, to suggest that it is a matter of urgency that feminism interrogate its complicity with modern technology in a way that responds to the distinctive concerns of feminism; and, second, to suggest that feminism should reclaim its contribution to the historical critique of modern technology, as this is suggested in the work of Jessica Benjamin, a feminist and psychoanalyst, whose thought is deeply indebted to the Frankfurt School's critique of instrumental rationality, among others.

Feminism and Modern Technology

Feminism has legitimised the incorporation of women into the subject position of the paid worker, but this has been a pyrrhic victory. Women are free to join a hyper-capitalist and instrumental mode of organising social life. This is the modern technological world of which Heidegger speaks where everything and everyone presents as a resource (Wrathall 2011, 198). It is a world that operates with no regard for the integrity of objects (including people): 'In such a world, nothing is encountered as really mattering, that is, as having a worth that exceeds its purely instrumental value for satisfying transitory urges' (Wrathall 2011, 198). Is this what we, feminists, want? The paradox of finding ourselves in a fix where our wants and desires seem to have landed us somewhere fundamentally problematic is surely emblematic of the modern condition at this time.

Feminism is deeply implicated in the ontology of modern technology. Yet, so understood feminism is self-cancelling. In embracing the ethos of a context-indifferent instrumentality, feminism withdraws any claim for social recognition of sex difference and all it implies. So far as modern technology enables a fantasy of omnipotence the human subject seeks to release itself from all determination, in this case, the determinations of embodied sex difference. As Arendt (1958, 3) declares, 'there is no reason to doubt' that technology will enable the human being to pursue, and even realise, this fantasy. For those who are beguiled by this fantasy, there is an investment in not listening to the claims of our earthly being, in this case, the claims of women's sexed earthly being.

This self-cancelling feminism conceals what, after Heidegger, we might call the essence of feminism; namely, an attachment to the reality and significance of sex difference as this attachment is shaped by a female standpoint. This attachment is

articulated as a twofold claim. First, that women should be free to develop as individuals or unique beings who creatively engage with how they live their sexed embodied being. Second, as 'mothers' in somatic, psychic and symbolic senses, women should be free to respond to the needs of their infants and young children in such a way as to call their uniqueness as persons into being as well as to facilitate their development of an independent sense of self. Jessica Benjamin explains how it is possible to integrate these two dimensions of women's freedom in her account of the intersubjective relationship of mutual recognition between mother and infant:

> The intersubjective view maintains that the individual grows in and through the relationship to other subjects. Most important, this perspective observes that the other whom the self meets is also a self, a subject in his or her right. (Benjamin 1988, 19–20)

Benjamin suggests that a sense of self is available to mother and infant only if each is able to attend and respond to the integrity of the other as a unique being.

Freedom understood as the development of a sense of self where the person needs to find a way of expressing her sense of self in all that she does is the idea of freedom at issue. It does not mean that the individual seeks to free herself from the claims of reality, whether these arise from within her own being or from her world, but that she explores these claims in relation to her sense of self. If she is to develop and confirm her sense of self, she has to permit these claims to be real, and to assert themselves as claims on her, on her capacity to change and grow. If she defends herself against these claims, and attempts to use will to control her world, she has to seek control over not just the others in her environment (including her children) but herself. In the process of which she loses pleasure in, and a sense for the integrity of, herself, of other selves and of the world that they share because she has limited or even stopped their ability to claim her attention and her care.

Feminism advocates for the kind of individualism that is tied to what it means to value and recognise each human being in his or her integrity, namely his or her unique way of being human. An individualism that centres on the uniqueness of the human subject is oriented to nourishing and welcoming the courage the individual must develop in daring to discover and come to know herself, a lifelong project. At the same time, in its advocacy for the assimilation of women into the technological world, feminism has embraced an instrumental individualism. This is one where women are expected to present as individuals, who are abstracted from their sexed embodied being and its maternal entanglements, and to be available as individual units of calculable performance. These two individualisms are fundamentally at odds. Whether the second individualism is one worthy of the name is questionable.

Feminism is a central contributor to an historical family of movements that champion the idea of freedom understood as creative living (Winnicott 1971). This idea of freedom requires the group to relax its hold over the individual, to no longer ask of the individual that she sacrifice her sense of self to group needs, and to open up a space where individuals negotiate how it is possible to reconcile their sense of self with group needs. This set of movements includes psychoanalysis and the many somatic, spiritual and

post-traditionalist religious practices of personal growth and development that are entwined with each other from the end of the eighteenth century.

Hannah Arendt offers a conception of freedom that is based on the idea of the uniqueness of the human person. It involves an idea of equality that centres on recognition of each human being in his or her distinctness. Thus equality does not mean sameness, but implies 'the paradoxical plurality of unique beings' (Arendt 1958, 176). Uniqueness, Arendt stressed in her secular, post-traditionalist way of engaging with a core posit of Judaism, is not made; it is given in the fact of one's birth. The issue concerns whether, as individuals or as society, we know how precious is this gift, whether we are prepared to organise our lives so that we cherish and cultivate it. In her discussion of Arendt's idea of givenness, Peg Birmingham (2006, 73) refers to Arendt's argument that 'the disturbing miracle contained in the fact that each of us is made as he is—single, unique, unchangeable' is a 'permanent threat' to the Western tradition of the public sphere, where the law of equality understood as sameness prevails (the quotations are Arendt's words). Birmingham comments:

> Arendt's suggestion that the 'given' is relegated to the private sphere not because of its diminutive or privative status in comparison to the reality granted by the light of the public space (as she argues in *The Human Condition*) but because of a long-standing and deep-seated Western resentment toward the singular and the unique is striking.

Birmingham (2006, 72–73, emphasis in the original) invites her reader to heed Arendt's call 'for the *political* acceptance of the "miracle of givenness"', 'the miracle of the universe, of man and of being' (here double quotation marks refer to citations of Arendt). She comments:

> For Arendt, embodiment, including differences in gender as well as differences in ethnicity, like being Jewish, are included in the 'the birth of the given.' These are *physei*, not *nomoi*. To deny givenness would be a form of madness.… Givenness carries the ethical demand of unconditional affirmation and gratitude – *Amo:Volo ut sis.* (Birmingham 2006, 73)

To open to appreciation for the given, and to an idea of freedom as a creative partnership with the given, is to allow entities to matter, to make claims on us. Mark Wrathall, after Heidegger, suggests we can do this only if we can see 'things that shine forth with a holiness (i.e. a dignity and worth that exceeds our will)' (2011, 209). We have somehow to (re)discover the divine, to find once more a sense of gratitude and respect for the given. Yet it must be a post-traditionalist way if we are to be free to find our own sense of the divine, unhampered by the authoritarian traditions of old religion. Wrathall draws on Heidegger's idea of the fourfold (discussed further below), to argue that we cannot endow phenomena including human beings with intrinsic value, as distinct from being resources to be used, unless we develop this capacity to respect and value things in their reality, and that it is an orientation to the divine that is the basis of this capacity, 'An openness to divinities that themselves attune us… makes it possible to experience things in the world

as sacred, and as making demands on us, which in turn allows them to have existential importance for us' (Wrathall 2011, 210):

> The death of the theologian's God offers us at least the possibility of a recovery of an immediate experience of the divine that has only rarely been achieved—that is, an experience of a living God with a presence in our world. Such a God would have an importance incommensurate with any object. As the source of our attunement, God would matter to us not just in the sense that our practices require his presence for their fulfilment. He would also matter as the being that calls us into the kind of engagement with the world that we embody. He would, in short, be a God before whom we could pray, to whom we could sacrifice, in front of whom we could fall to our knees in awe. (Wrathall 2011, 210–211)

I agree with Wrathall's (2011, 211) proposition that '[t]he only means we have available to this end are the religious practices we have inherited'. This inheritance becomes ours as we creatively engage with it and ask it to accommodate ideas of feminism, environmentalism and subjective freedom.

Contemporary Hyper-Capitalism

I now briefly characterise neo-liberal or hyper-capitalism to suggest what it means to assimilate women into this way of living. The hallmarks of this way of organising human society are the following:

(1) The historically unprecedented withdrawal of legitimacy from all kinds of work that is not priced in a market setting, including direct state service provision, services that are offered for a fixed fee, stipendiary work in not-for-profit organisations and all the many forms of unpaid work. Work that is not priced in a market setting is rendered invisible in a framework where positive value is given only to participation in the market economy.

(2) The commodification of all things, including the human services. The core of such work is denoted in the idea of service to human needs. To be sure, to considerable extent, human services can be designed in such a way that they are bought and sold in market exchange and therefore pitched to consumer wants. The question concerns the ethical substance of service to human needs, and how far it survives commodification. Human service work is cast inappropriately in the instrumentalism of a means–end relationship, and its sustainability risked, when it is forced into the model of profit-oriented competition to provide commodities at a price that consumers value (see Yeatman 2009, chapter 6).

(3) The extension of the corporate model of employer prerogative, and the correlative imposition of the disciplines of performance management, to all work settings.

(4) The transformation of the political discourse of rights (freedom, equality and political community), an inherently public discourse, into a narrow, legalistic and private discourse of property right. The value of equality is dropped entirely in favour of that of equal opportunity, and the idea of individual rights is re-described in terms of the opportunity of each individual to enjoy standing as a private property owner.

(5) The adoption of the market economy as the normative point of reference for institutional design means that there is a parallel derogation of all things public, especially of: the state's facilitation of an open and informed sphere of public conversation; the state's

responsibility for public provision of services that enhance the well-being of all considered as subjects of this public jurisdiction; and the assumption of state responsibility for this political community, understood as a community of fate, past, present and future.

This is the context in which women are incorporated into paid employment at this time. It was not the context that second-wave feminists assumed when they are argued for such public policies as equal opportunity, affirmative action, publicly funded childcare services and public income support for sole parents. Their assumptions were tied to the continuation of the Keynesian Welfare State as this was to be reformed by feminist agendas for public policy and public administration. The public policy that feminists embraced presupposed the values of a mixed economy, a public bureaucracy, a planned approach to the public provision of needs in health, welfare and education, and the use of appropriate professional expertise in policy design and evaluation.

I have seen the ascendancy of the market model of work and value as the outcome of a neo-liberal counter-revolution in response to both the Keynesian welfare state and the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s.[2] There is a basis for this view as Daniel Stedman-Jones (2012) has shown. Neoliberalism is dedicated to the undoing of public collectivism as it centres on the authority of the state. Because it assumes that all action is driven by the dynamics of private interest, it cannot credit the possibility of publicly oriented action. It refuses the possibility that public office involves a distinctive ethical comportment in which public bureaucrats are educated and trained. It is committed to the doctrine that the only rationale for the state resides in the provision of security for property right. Thereby it is committed to the inherently contradictory proposition that the function of the state as the public authority is to serve private right.

But we have to think more deeply: how is it that neo-liberalism has seemed so compelling? Heidegger's conception of modern technology may offer an explanation.

Let us note one extraordinary consequence of the establishment of the market economy as the framework for institutional design. For the first time in the history of modern society, societal support for the dedication of maternal time, care and concern to the needs of infants and young children is withdrawn. Perhaps this is true for the first time in the history of human society in the light of the conclusion reached by second-wave feminist scholars: 'Although the fact that women give birth to and nurse children would seem to have no necessary entailments, it appears to provide a focus for the simplest distinction in the adult division of labor in any human group' (Rosaldo 1974, 24). Feminists have been caught on the back foot in responding to this extraordinary destruction of a core aspect of social organisation. Generally, their response has been one of complicity, arguing for access to childcare services so as to assist women to participate in paid employment, or for 'life–work balance', but being too frightened that, if they prioritise the needs of children for the time, care and concern of their mothers, they must compromise advocacy for equal opportunity for women.

It has been left to advocates of child health and well-being such as Fiona Stanley in Australia to raise questions about the impact of increased female labour force participation on children (Li, McMurray, and Stanley 2008, 70). They have done so in the context of a more general argument that 'the current, neo-liberal globalised economy' is impacting negatively on children. Here they point to the increase in precarious work[3] alongside the increasingly time-intensive nature of well-paid work:

This leaves most workers with a parenting dilemma. Those with financial security find little time for children. On the other hand, many parents who spend enough time at home are constantly worried about money and paying the bills, and are often without the financial security to purchase their own home. (Li, McMurray, and Stanley 2008, 69)

Heidegger's 'The Question Concerning Technology'

In his essay 'The Question Concerning Technology' Martin Heidegger suggests that technology is expressive of the human mode of being. It is not a question of getting rid of technology then so much as understanding how technology is expressive of human dignity. He begins with the proposition that '[q]uestioning builds a way', and '[t]his way is one of thinking' (Heidegger 1977, 287). In other words, only a true understanding of technology can bring us into a free relationship with it (1977, 289). He takes the seemingly obvious aspect of technology, instrumentality, and asks what is this? As a means–ends relationship, instrumentality implicates the relationship of causality: 'Whenever ends are pursued and means are employed, wherever instrumentality reigns, there reigns causality' (1977, 289). Using the example of the making of a silver chalice, he calls on philosophy to see how it invites us to think about causality. There are four aspects of causality: (1) there is the material of the thing to be worked, silver here; (2) there is the form of the thing that is to be produced, the chalice; (3) there is the purpose for which this thing is designed, a religious ritual; and (4) the cause that brings about the effect, the silversmith. Heidegger's intention is to show how limited and reductive is our view when we reduce causality to the work of the silver smith, to the *causa efficiens*, the cause that brings about the effect. In emphasising how the other aspects of causality condition the thing, Heidegger wants us to see that our idea of instrumentality makes it impossible for us to understand our debt to them, and encourages us in a delusional notion of anthropocentric instrumental control.

This idea of the power of human making is not just hubristic but thoroughly inadequate if we are to understand technology. Heidegger wants us to be open to what he calls a thing. In 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking' (Heidegger 1977) he offers his conception of thingness in terms of how human beings dwell, and in so doing, create or disclose a sense of place (see Wrathall 2011). In Heidegger's conception of the fourfold, the thing is the place where the distinctively human orientation to earth, sky, the mortals and the divinities is disclosed and materialised. Heidegger's fourfold suggests the orientation of an earth-bound, mortal creature whose symbolic capacity opens up an awareness of creation/ creativity, transcendence/immanence and finitude/infinity. Here a non-anthropocentric technology is associated with dwelling, where '[d]welling is the way in which mortals are on the earth' (1977, 326). The 'fundamental character of dwelling' is that it spares or preserves something, freeing it into 'a preserve of peace'. The metaphors of preserving, sparing, nurturing and freeing something so it is safeguarded 'in its essence' (Heidegger 1977, 327) suggest respect and gratitude for things where the human being dwells, an orientation that is expressed in the activity of 'gathering'. The feminist philosopher Gemma Corradi Fiumara comments: 'There is a demand here for a relationship with thinking anchored to humility and faithfulness, an approach which is unheard of in our current thinking, revolving around grasping, mastering, using'. Further, this perspective 'is

characterized by the requirement that we dwell with, abide by, whatever we try to know; that we aim at coexistence with, rather than knowledge-of' (Fiumara 1990, 15).

In 'The Question concerning Technology', Heidegger suggests the ethical aspect of responsibility and indebtedness with regard to the contribution that each of the four causes makes to the silver chalice. The material of silver, the idea of a chalice and the telos of a chalice ('that which in advance confines the chalice within the realm of consecration and bestowal' [Heidegger 1977, 291]) are each in their particular way responsible for the chalice and, accordingly, the chalice is indebted to them. As to the fourth participant, the silversmith, Heidegger can now suggest that the idea of him as a *causa efficiens*, where the chalice comes about as 'the effect of a making' (1977, 291), is a mistaken understanding. It is not 'making' (as in the anthropocentric conception) but a gathering, a 'bringing forth', *poiēsis* (1977, 293): 'The silversmith considers carefully and gathers together the three aforementioned ways of being responsible and indebted' (1977, 291). Heidegger clarifies what he means by responsibility in this connection:

> The four ways of being responsible bring something into appearance. They let it come forth into presencing [*Anwesen*]. They set it free to that place and so start it on its way, namely, into its complete arrival. The principal characteristic of being responsible is this starting something on its way into arrival. (1977, 292)

The essence of technology then is to bring something into appearance, to reveal: 'Bringing-forth … gathers within itself the four modes of occasioning—causality—and rules them throughout' (Heidegger 1977, 294). Thus he concludes: 'Technology is no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing' (1977, 294).

Modern technology is also a revealing (Heidegger 1977, 296), but the nature of such revealing is that of 'a challenging' (1977, 295). It conceals the four ways of being responsible for bringing something into appearance. Everything is turned into a resource. There is no sense of place, rather simply the contraposition of a controlling human will to all that seems to be waiting to be used, and a ruthless distinction between what can be used, and what cannot. This is a 'setting upon' that challenges and expedites 'the energies of nature' in two ways:

> It expedites in that it unlocks and exposes. Yet that expediting is always itself directed from the beginning towards furthering something else, i.e., toward driving on to the maximum yield at the minimum expense. (Heidegger 1977, 297)

What kind of revealing or unconcealment then is involved in modern technology?

> What kind of unconcealment is it, then, that is peculiar to that which results from this setting-upon that challenges? Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve [*Bestand*]. (Heidegger 1977, 298)

Whatever is positioned as standing reserve is no longer permitted autonomy as an object: 'it has its standing only from the ordering of the orderable' (1977, 299).

Everything is revealed or unconcealed in a way that 'is an ordering'. Where this holds sway, revealing in the sense of *poiēsis* is not possible. The human being does not reveal in the sense of one who gathers, 'one who listens', but becomes one 'who simply obeys' (Heidegger 1977, 306). This 'merely instrumental' and 'merely anthropological' conception of technology (1977, 302) 'is the supreme danger' that 'attests itself to us in two ways':

> As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectless is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall, that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing reserve. Meanwhile, man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way the illusion comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: it seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself. (Heidegger 1977, 308)

The surrender of insight achieved through creative processes of revealing possibilities of being, and this enthralment to delusion, is not freedom: it is utter dereliction. Heidegger suggests that when we confront such danger that we may be driven to think about the essence of technology: 'it is precisely in this extreme danger that the innermost indestructible belonginess of man within granting may come to light, provided that we, for our part, begin to pay heed to the essence of technology' (1977, 314).

What May Prompt Awareness that We Are 'In Extreme Danger'?

How do we accept that we are in 'this extreme danger'? 'Questioning builds a way' (Heidegger 1977, 287), Heidegger suggests, and one line of questioning that may help us accept we are in such danger is to explore how ersatz is the kind of individualism that is implicated in modern technology. Let us do so keeping a feminist perspective in mind.

Let us become aware of what it means for women to be positioned as part of 'standing reserve'. Like men, they have to permit their being to be instrumentalised, turned into a means of doing more with less, and adapted to the adrenalin-rushed rhythms of fast, managed performance. In the world of modern technology, infants and young children drop out of visibility because they are not useful. Rather, their needs compromise the usefulness of the women who mother them.

If feminists are to engage in questioning of a kind that builds a way, we have to clarify how modern technology offers a false rather than a genuine promise of freedom for women. Freedom of a kind that makes it impossible for women to mother in a way that their babies and children need them to cannot be genuine freedom. Nor, surely, is it freedom to find oneself in a position where one is harnessed to the performativity requirements of modern technology as these are imposed by means of employer prerogative. It cannot be freedom to turn one's own gifts, capacities and organic being into means to realise 'merely instrumental' ends. Finally, it cannot be freedom for women to find themselves in a situation where the distinctive claims of their embodied being as humans who menstruate, give birth, lactate and go through menopause are not given any space within the world of modern technology.[4]

Modern technology seems to invite us to assume life as individuals, but is this really the case? In harnessing us to the regime of instrumentality, it requires us to instrumentalise our uniqueness. Our uniqueness resides in our sense of self, and this is something we risk and develop only if we feel safe; otherwise we keep it safely hidden (a point that Winnicott [1990] emphasises in his conception of the 'true' as distinct from the 'false' self). If we are lucky enough to have had parents who invite us to assume an existence in the world that is shaped by our sense of self, then we will develop the capacity for creative living. A sense that we are truly alive, and we are free to creatively explore and adapt external reality in relation to our subjective projections onto it. A need to bring our sense of integrity as a self to all that we do, a need that is the doorway to our capacity to listen to and grow respect for the integrity of other beings. When modern technology instrumentalises our unique way of acting, it implies that it is of little consequence whether it is you, me or someone else who acts. Our individuality disappears into particularity. Uniqueness and particularity are not the same thing. As unique beings we are absolutely irreplaceable. As particulars, we are both replaceable and superfluous.

Jessica Benjamin's Critique of Gender Domination

My focus is primarily on Benjamin's first major publication *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (1988). Her argument has two aspects: the first posits a relationship of 'primary intersubjectivity' (1988, 19) with reference to the period of early infancy, and the second offers a critique of the ways in which gender domination makes it impossible to develop or value intersubjectivity. Let me take these in turn.

In the first line of argument, Benjamin offers a concrete account of the distinctive sociality associated with the maternal care and nurture of infants and young children. In doing this she consciously works a debt to two historical forces, the first of which is feminism in claiming the mother/woman as a subject in her own right, and the second of which is the contribution of psychoanalytic currents of thought to a radical rethinking of the status of the baby (see Steiner 2000). This occurs over the course of some five or six decades, it is distilled in the work of Winnicott and Bowlby during and after the Second World War, and in the new empirical infant observation research led by Esther Bick and others. The conceptual shift is one of changing a view of the baby in the first six months as lacking a mind to a view of the baby as a centre of subjective experience from birth (if not before birth). The import of Benjamin's analysis is that these two shifts are historical–phenomenological in nature; one cannot happen without the other.

Benjamin specifies intersubjectivity in terms of there being 'two living subjects' whose lives are deeply entwined with each other, and where the rationale for the relationship resides in the facilitation of the effective coming into being of one of these subjects as an organised centre of selfhood by the other. This relationship is expressed as a mutuality of recognition. Benjamin ensures that we do not sentimentalise this idea of mutuality in her insistence on the difficulties of achieving it, and on the inevitability of its breakdown. The infant's sense of self is expressed as self-assertion, but this project is fraught with danger if the parental subject is unable to survive the baby's self-assertion which is what happens if the parental subject caves in to the baby's desires, punishes the baby for them, colonises these desires with her own, or walks away. The baby's

dependence on the recognition from the parental subject is dangerous to its sense of acquiring reality as a distinct self if the parental subject is unable to help the baby differentiate between its sense of self and that of the other. The parental subject has to assist the baby in recognising limits to its desires. The baby's discovery of reality has three distinct and dialectically related aspects: discovery of its own reality as a discrete centre of subjective experience or sense of self; discovery of the other's reality as a different centre of subjective experience or sense of self; and discovery of shared reality. Benjamin draws on Winnicott's theory of destruction. The sense of reality as discovered allows reality and selfhood to be positively rather than antagonistically related:

> Winnicott's theory of destruction also implies a revision in the psychoanalytic idea of reality—it suggests a 'reality principle' that is a positive source of pleasure, the pleasure of connecting with the outside, and not just a brake on narcissism or aggression. Beyond the sensible ego's bowing to reality is the joy in the other's survival and the recognition of shared reality. Reality is thus *discovered*, rather than *imposed*; and authentic selfhood is not absorbed from without but discovered within. Reality neither wholly creates the self (as the pressure of the external world creates Freud's ego) nor is it wholly created by the self. (Benjamin 1988, 40–41; emphases in the original)

From the mother's perspective, it is possible to facilitate the baby's achievement of a sense of self and, specifically, survive the baby's destructive force of self-assertion, only if she has achieved a sense of self. She has to be sufficiently secure, and available, in her sense of self to enjoy the baby's aliveness as the distinct and unique centre of animation that it is. For this to be possible she has to enjoy her own sense of being alive as a distinct subject:

> The mother cannot (and should not) be a mirror; she must not merely reflect back what the child asserts; she must embody something of the not-me; she must be an independent other who responds in her different way. Indeed, as the child increasingly establishes his own independent centre of existence, her recognition will be meaningful only to the extent that it reflects her own equally separate subjectivity. (Benjamin 1988, 24)

Benjamin emphasises that 'the need for *mutual* recognition, the necessity of recognizing as well as being recognized by the other … is what so many theories have missed' (Benjamin 1988, 23, emphasis in the original). She argues that '(n)o psychological theory has adequately articulated the mother's independent existence'; '(t)hus even the accounts of the mother-infant relationship which do consider parental responsiveness always revert to a view of the mother as the baby's vehicle for growth, an object of the baby's needs' (1988, 23). And:

> (i)t must be acknowledged that we have only just begun to think about the mother as a subject in her own right, principally because of contemporary feminism, which made us aware of the disastrous results for women of being reduced to the extension of a two-month-old. (1988, 23)

It is not just that the mother and the baby are dependent on each other's recognition. It is also that these two subjects can establish mutuality only if they enjoy each other's presence and aliveness and enjoy 'the experience of being with another':

> Experiences of 'being with' are predicated on a continually evolving awareness of difference, on a sense of intimacy felt as occurring between 'the two of us.' The fact that self and other are not merged is precisely what makes experiences of merging have such emotional impact. The externality of the other makes one feel one is truly being 'fed,' getting nourishment from the outside, rather than supplying everything for oneself. (Benjamin 1988, 47)

Benjamin stresses the living nature of this connection. She writes of the 'life-giving exchange with others' (1988, 22), implying that in recognising the other, the subject literally helps call the other into being alive, and into 'live company' with her (as Anne Alvarez 1992, puts it).

Intersubjectivity involves the following: there is 'attunement' between two (and possibly more than two) subjects, a 'dance of mutual recognition' (Benjamin 1988, 127) where these subjects play with their differences, their likeness and their shared sense of being together; pleasure in being with the other is a primary feature of the relationship; each feels securely held in the other's mind (1988, 72); each is able to enjoy the other's survival of its self-assertion; each takes pleasure in the other's aliveness; together these subjects achieve a shared reality (1988, 41); and the nature of the identification with the other is 'concrete' (1988, 170). We might say bringing Benjamin and Heidegger together that such a connection is a place that gathers the selves of those involved and enables them to dwell together.

Benjamin argues that women can become subjects in their own right only if 'gender polarity' breaks down. She wants it to be possible for male and female subjects to have available a range of identifications to use as they need them: these being masculine, feminine, and gender-neutral identifications. She calls this ideal 'gender over-inclusiveness' (Benjamin 1995, chapter 2). For it to be on offer, men have to share parenting with women, women have to have a life available to them outside the family, and both men and women as individuals have to be oriented to the achievement of a sense of self. The world outside the family has to accommodate and be responsive to the claims of men and women as selves or as unique individuals. At the same time in all relationships it has to be possible to acknowledge one's dependence on the other for mutual recognition, and to develop modes of self-assertion that comfortably work with such dependence.

Following the Frankfurt School, Benjamin argues that in a society dominated by instrumental rationality, individuality is socially banished 'to the private domestic world of women and children' (Benjamin 1988, 185). She argues that, while instrumental rationality has a gender-neutral appearance, its logic is that of gender domination:

> Thus regardless of woman's increasing participation in the public, productive sphere of society, it remains, in its practices and principles, 'a man's world.' The presence of women has no effect on its rules and processes. The public institutions and the relations of production display an apparent genderlessness, so impersonal do they seem. Yet it is precisely this objective character, with its indifference to personal

need, that is recognized as the hallmark of masculine power. It is precisely the pervasive depersonalization, the banishment of nurturance to the private sphere, that reveal the logic of male dominance, of female denigration and exclusion. (Benjamin 1988, 187)

For Benjamin, gender domination is a binary structuring of psychic and social life that splits off a subject position that is identified with control, mastery and self-sufficiency from a subject position that is emblematic of symbiosis, dependency and lack of self-sufficiency. Such a structuring is expressed as a relationship of domination, a dyadic relationship of complementarity between the subject who asserts itself and a subject who is positioned as object for the former subject's will. Benjamin makes her case through a critique of the Freudian and classical psychoanalytic understanding of the oedipal stage of development which accounts for the boy's individuation as a subject in terms of his separation from, and repudiation of, his early infantile dependence on the maternal subject. This kind of individuation is antipathetic to mutuality; it is expressed in an inability to recognise the difference of the other and in a compulsive identification with likeness to the modal masculine subject:

> The father's ascendancy in the Oedipus complex spells the denial of the mother's subjectivity, and thus the breakdown of mutual recognition. At the heart of psychoanalytic theory lies an unacknowledged paradox: the creation of difference [as in the differentiation of a masculine individuality] distorts, rather than fosters, the recognition of the other. Difference turns out to be governed by the code of domination. (Benjamin 1988, 135)

> Separation takes precedence over connection, and constructing boundaries becomes more important than lasting attachment. The two central elements of recognition—being like and being distinct—are split apart. Instead of recognizing the other who is different, the boy either identifies or disidentifies. Recognition is thus reduced to a one-dimension identification with likeness…. (Benjamin 1988, 170)

Benjamin emphasises the cost to the male subject who develops in this way. In splitting off his infantile immersion in a maternal environment in which he was nourished as a concrete and unique individual, he is forced into a severe psychic discontinuity. He can no longer identify with the intimate connection he enjoyed with his mother, he loses, Benjamin suggests, the inner space he had achieved in experiencing a sense of being securely held within his mother's mind, and, in projecting onto women his lost sense of intimacy, he envies them for qualities that he has lost in himself (Benjamin 1988, 162–163). The masculine ideal he identifies with is one of self-sufficiency for in splitting off his infantile identification with his mother, he repudiates his dependency on her, and Benjamin suggests, all forms of dependency. In particular, 'the one-dimensional identification with likeness' (Benjamin 1988, 170) that shapes this kind of individuality involves an abstraction from the concretely embodied and whole–self interaction of two subjects that characterises intersubjectivity.

Benjamin proposes that 'domination begins with the attempt to deny dependency' and that it is the inability to sustain the tension of the paradox, of needing *both*

self-assertion *and* recognition that 'manifests itself in all forms of domination' (1988, 50). She positions women inside the desire for domination within a culture that is shaped by gender polarity. Unlike men, women are caught in a nasty vice. They are positioned as 'like' their mothers but their culture invites them to identify with their fathers as idealised objects of identification, an idealisation that intensifies if the men on whom they project this need for identification refuse it: since 'the girl's identification with her father is typically refused, her love is commonly tainted by envy and submission'. 'We know that on the level of daily life, when the desire to identify goes unanswered, envy takes its place' (1988, 111).

Benjamin argues that the structure of complementarity (do or be done to) that characterises domination is inherently reversible: 'it is set in motion by the denial of recognition to the original other, the mother who is reduced to object' (Benjamin 1988, 220). She continues:

> The resulting structure of subject and object (gender polarity) thoroughly permeates our social relations, our ways of knowing, our efforts to transform and control the world; and it is this gendered logic which ultimately forecloses on the intersubjective realm—that space in which the mutual recognition of subjects can compete with the reversible relationship of domination. (Benjamin 1988, 220)

A gender-neutral regime of domination continues the structure of gender polarity, with its inherent denigration of all who cannot live up to the ideal of a self-sufficient individuality.

Conclusion

McWhorter (2009, 6) suggests that, if we are to do what Heidegger suggests, to engage in practices that 'allow the world—the earth, things—to show themselves on their own terms', we have to give up our desire for control. This desire is ubiquitous and it shows up in all the ways we seek to manage ourselves, our relationships, our children, other creatures, the earth and now even the weather (on this see Hamilton 2013). McWhorter suggests that, as the danger of which Heidegger warns is now more evident, our first impulse is to seek more control through better management.

Heidegger's attempt to differentiate between an anthropocentric instrumentality and one that allows for a differentiated idea of causality, one where our debt to others, to things and to a place we share with them, can be acknowledged has its parallel, I have suggested, in Jessica Benjamin's proposition that, if freedom is autonomy, then it must be an autonomy that reckons with both likeness and difference, and with dependence on the other for recognition. Both Heidegger and Benjamin suggest we cannot find a way out of our entrapment in the modern structure of domination if we do not first acknowledge how seduced we are by it. Benjamin suggests that, if we are to be able to think self-assertion and mutual recognition, difference and likeness, as co-determining, it is because we are able to discern in the joyous dance between mother and infant something that is not relegated to nature as an organic bond but as something that is both this and an extraordinarily complex encounter between two living subjects. It is unlikely that awareness of our debt to and dependence on other beings and things can develop without gratitude for their existence. Wrathall reminds us that Heidegger's account of the

technological age grew out of his interpretation of Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God:

> Heidegger's point is that the loss of a God, properly understood, is an apocalyptic event—one that cannot be treated with the same equanimity that we might threat the loss of some mundane object. To own up to the loss of God requires of us that we reach for a new kind of divinity—a divinity that can withstand the loss of the old God. (Wrathall 2011, 196)

NOTES

1.   Zimmerman (2006, 302) allows us to glimpse Heidegger's historical narrative of modern technology: 'Modern science forces entities to reveal themselves only in accordance with theoretical presuppositions consistent with Western humanity's ever-increasing drive to gain control of everything. While during the industrial age the achievement of such control could be described as a means for the end of improving the human estate, during the technological era—which may be said to have commenced with the horrors of World War I—humanity itself has become a means to an end without purpose: the quest for power for its own sake, which Heidegger described as the sheer Will to Will'.
2.   These social movements sought to add what Albert Hirschman (1970) calls 'voice' to the conduct of all social relationships, including government policy and programmes. They were a major influence on the administrative reform movement that sought to democratise the twentieth-century 'administrative state'.
3.   Precarious work is also referred to as 'insecure work'. See the Australian Council and Trade Unions (2012) report of its inquiry into insecure work. There the definition of indicators of insecure work is: (1) unpredictable, fluctuating pay; (2) inferior rights and entitlements, including limited or no access to paid leave; (3) irregular and unpredictable working hours, or working hours that, although regular, are too long or too few and/or non-social or fragmented; (4) lack of security and/or uncertainty over the length of the job; and (5) lack of voice at work on wages, conditions and work organisation (ACTU 2012, 1).
4.   I agree with Kruks (2001, 149) here that 'there are certain stable biological attributes to the female body, and we should not be too hasty in dismissing them as wholly irrelevant'. Kruks continues: 'Although there are exceptions, in general women menstruate, have a vagina, clitoris, and womb, are capable of being impregnated, have large mammary glands on their chests, are shorter and lighter in weight, and have a larger percentage of body fat than men, and so on'.

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