The Borders of a Canvas Tent: An Analysis of Feminist Utopian Novels

Catherine R. Caldwell

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THE BORDERS OF A CANVAS TENT: AN ANALYSIS OF FEMINIST UTOPIAN NOVELS

by

Catherine R. Caldwell

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
Department of Sociology

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
August 1994
This thesis is a critical examination of three feminist utopian novels: *Woman on the Edge of Time*, by Marge Piercy; *Herland*, by Charlotte Perkins Gillman, and *Les Guerilleres*, by Monique Wittig. The study, derived from the sociology of knowledge and deconstruction theory, focuses on similarities and differences involving: (a) sexuality; (b) community building; (c) religion; (d) decision making processes, political systems, and modes of production; (e) crime, deviance and political conflict resolution; and (f) child rearing. The analysis demonstrates that utopia may serve to critique dominant ideology. It also shows how utopian novels treat, and suggest possibilities for, practical political change.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Utopian--1.b. Having no known location; existing nowhere.
2. Possessing or regarded as having impossibly or extravagantly ideal conditions in respect to politics, customs, social organization, etc.
3. Involving, based or founded on, imaginary or chimerical perfection; impossibly ideal, visionary. (Gove & Webster, 1961, p. 2525).

We learned a lot from societies that people used to call primitive. Primitive technically. But socially sophisticated. We tried to learn from cultures that dealt well with handling conflict, promoting cooperation, coming of age, growing a sense of community, getting sick, aging, going mad, dying. (Piercy, 1976, p. 20)

Feminist Utopias as Critique

The word Utopia comes from the greek u topos, meaning nowhere. The word itself implies fiction. From Webster’s to the Oxford English to the Word Perfect dictionary on my computer, definitions of utopia include words such as impossible, ideal, or chimera. However, if we allow for a shift in perspective, it might be possible to look at utopia as meaning anywhere, rather than nowhere.

Utopia as a portrait of perfection, an ideal for which we can strive, but which we can never hope to attain, has existed for thousands of years. Ever since Plato’s Republic, Utopian writers have been creating societies where people can exist in happiness and equality, free of oppression and the threat of violence.
Even if Utopias appear unattainable, they may serve to critique the culture in which they were written. Many critics, however, have argued that utopia is ineffective as critique and even less effective in the realm of praxis. They argue that utopia is the fictional creation of a perfect society which does not, and cannot exist in real time. Utopia belongs to the genre of escapist fiction of science fantasy, they say.

Karl Mannheim (1936), Marxist theorist and father of the sociology of knowledge, took the counter position.

Whenever we speak of Utopia we use the term merely in the relative sense, meaning thereby a Utopia which seems to be unrealizable only from the point of view of a given social order which is already in existence. (p. 196)

Therefore, Mannheim asserted that utopias are a commentary of our current social and political systems. They juxtapose the here and now with sustainable alternatives the authors present. Utopian ideas show how our common knowledge is not transfixed, but situational, one might even say malleable. These ideas poke at the borders of our world like a dragonfly on the roof of a canvas tent.

It is also important to look at how many portraits of Utopia draw upon elements of preindustrial societies. When we see how utopia is existent in everyday life, the pejorative nature of labelling utopia fictional is clear.

The Marxist doctrine (Shostak, 1981) "work according to one’s ability, take according to one’s need" (pp. 8-9) is an integral part of the !Kung society in Africa, for instance. The people of the Kalahari generally do not own more than twelve pounds of material
goods, and they often give what they do possess liberally as gifts. When they hunt, they swap arrows beforehand, so that the person whose arrow was used is partly responsible for the kill. This prevents stratification based on hunting skill, and further demonstrates how the fabric of the community is valued more highly than individual gain.

In this thesis, I show how three Utopian novelists analyze and deconstruct the dominant culture of the United States. I will illustrate how they present egalitarian and holistic alternatives to hierarchical and compartmentalized structures, many times drawing upon societies which have existed in real time.

Because one cannot expect to critique dominant ideology from a position of dominance, all of the works I have chosen were both written by women, and are feminist in content. This is especially helpful in avoiding an androcentric utopia, one in which women are equally exploited as they are in contemporary culture. Unfortunately, this happens all too often in utopian novels written by men. This androcentricism seems more naive than purposive, however, reflecting an absence of scrutiny with regard to the male/female paradigm. In short, certain assumptions regarding gender roles are often left unchallenged in male-centered utopias.

By analyzing these particular works, I plan to present several critiques of U.S. society and also several plausible alternatives to it. I will, in short, show how utopia has the potential to be revolutionary.
CHAPTER II

THEORY

My theoretical base for this project will integrate the sociology of knowledge and deconstruction theory; both confront ideological presuppositions, and suggest alternatives to the dominant ways of thinking.

Sociology of Knowledge

One of the foremost tenets of the sociology of knowledge, as developed by Marx, and especially Mannheim, is that political economy shapes our thought processes, and hence no individual has autonomy of thought. The environment in which we are socialized mold our basic assumptions about how the world works; our perceptions of ourselves and others, our value systems, our views of what is and what is not normal, our morality, our motivations, and even our ascetic tastes. According to this view, culture reaches beyond economic activity, beyond political and social events even into our minds, teaching us to define what is proper or righteous or good, what is macabre or disgusting, what is a success, what is a failure.

In a hierarchical society such as the United States, thought systems include justifications for the status quo which appear as common knowledge to us. According to Mannheim (1936), Karl Marx wrote that
the economic categories are only the theoretical expressions, the abstractions of the social relations of production. The same men who establish social relations conformably with their material productivity, produce also the principles, the ideas, the categories, conformably with their social relations. (p. 42)

Marx illustrates firstly that those who control the means of production in a society have the power to establish dominant ideology, and secondly, that beliefs and ideas do not exist in an autonomous mental realm, but are anchored within actual social contexts.

Althusser, a French structuralist and marxist, argued that ideology should be viewed as practice and not as a series of free floating ideas. By this he means that ideologies are necessarily linked to their method of production. That is, the ideas produced in state apparatuses (such as church, school, or the media) are not autonomous--they have a place of origin. Therefore, these ideas always exist within an institution. Ideologies involve not only thinking about, but also acting within the world. Ideology, then, "is a living relationship with our environment" (Abercrombie, 1980, p. 75). Our perspectives, how we relate to the world and each other, the values, goals, and conceptions of success we have formed are determined by a lived relationship with the world. They are formed by an interplay between us and the institutions which taught us how to think.

Similarly, institutions cannot be considered autonomous. They, too, must be looked at in a broader social context. Max Weber, for instance, showed the importance of the Protestant work ethic in mainstream capitalism. He illustrated how the two systems are
interconnected, how they perpetuate each other (cited by Abercrombie, 1980, p. 105). Einstein (1990) shows how the institutions of patriarchy--or the subordination of women in a society dominated by men--are mutually dependent. He states that the "power, or the converse--oppression--derives from both sex and class, and this is manifested through both the material and the ideological dimensions of patriarchy and capitalism" (p. 129). Dominant ideology, therefore, is a complex interplay of institutions which teach us to think and behave in a certain manner in order to exist within a particular social reality.

Ideology serves not only as a tool for socialization, but also to elicit consent from oppressed groups in their domination. There is a hidden agenda involved which justifies power relations and teaches us to see our oppression as commonplace, as the way things are. We have learned to view as truth that which keeps us in a subordinate position. We have even learned to oppress ourselves.

For instance, we are brought up on such myths as 'the American Dream', the idea that everyone is equally capable of success, when we know that the best determinant of a person's income is her or his father's income. It is common knowledge that women are the weaker sex and the only way we can expect to become as good as men is to transcend biology, i.e., act like a man. Generally, we know that addictive behaviors and insanity are diseases, not products of, and defined by, our social environment. We know that the homeless are shiftless, lazy, and drunk, as are most non-whites.
In fact, this learning process so permeates our minds that alternative perspectives seem bizarre, even absurd to us. According to Abercrombie, 1980,

in contemporary societies, it may be that the educational system is so imbued with dominant ideas that subordinate classes are literally unable to formulate their opposition; the prevalence of dominant ideas impedes dissent. (p. 24)

Utopian thought contests this universality. Before I explain how, I must emphasize that I speak of Utopia in the relative sense. That is, a utopia is only an unrealizable goal from the point of view of a particular social order already in existence. Mannheim (1936) states that

the reluctance to transcend the status quo tends toward the view of regarding something that is unrealizable merely in the given order as complete unrealizable in any order, so that by obscuring those distinctions one can suppress the validity of the claims of the relative order. By calling everything utopian that goes beyond the present existing order, one sets at rest the anxiety that might arise from the relative utopias that are realizable in another order. (p. 197)

Utopias are critiques of our social-economic systems. They present alternatives to the dominant culture, both in the physical sphere (by suggesting alternative forms of government, modes of production, decision making processes, living arrangements, etc.) and in the realm of ideas. Utopias take a penetrating look at the dominant ideology, including not only the broader philosophical and religious systems that help to shape our society, but also the every day pattern that permeate our existence. By going so far as to bring our inherent biases to the spotlight, we can begin to look at our society from an entirely new perspective. In this way, utopian
novelists, and specifically feminist utopian novelists, deconstruct hierarchical and patriarchal U.S. society.

Deconstruction Theory

Deconstruction theory complements work which highlights marginalized groups, because it focuses on philosophical oppositions. That is, it examines the established dichotomies that permeate most western thinking, such as white vs. black, culture vs. nature, spiritual vs. physical, thought vs. writing, and male vs. female. According to Culler (1982), Derrida suggests in *Positions*, that

> in a traditional philosophical opposition, we have not a peaceful coexistence of facing terms but a violent hierarchy. On of the terms dominates the other, occupies the commanding position. To deconstruct the opposition is above all at a particular moment, to reverse the hierarchy. (p. 85)

This subversion of the dichotomy at hand questions the very existence of the hierarchy. If the established primacy of one term can be challenged, that is, become marginalized as the other term becomes centralized, then the idea that either term is prime disintegrates and becomes merely an idea of difference.

Therefore, the first basic assumption underlying hierarchical deconstruction is that truth is neither objective nor absolute, but contextual and functional. Michael Foucault (Rabinow, 1984) eloquently states that

> each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are saying what counts as true. (p. 73)
In other words, our thought processes are so deeply ingrained that even if we struggle against the state and its institutions, it is not a guarantee that we will be heading toward utopia. If the dominant ideologies remain unaltered, then even a modification of a society's structures does not guarantee a lasting change. Abercrombie (1980) warns readers that a new society produced by a revolution may ensure the survival of older elements thought the forms of its new superstructures. In other words, if the dominant way of thinking remains unchallenged, then the new structures will reflect the old ones. It is important to keep in mind that even revolutionaries are well schooled in the worldview of the dominant society--the society that we seek to replace.

It follows, then, that the struggle toward utopia involves not only fighting the state, but also the type of individualization linked to the state. The key, according to Foucault, is to promote new forms of subjectivity thought refusal of the type of individuality which the state imposes on us (Rabinow, 1984, p. 22). He is advocating, here, a rejection of the dominant ideology as absolute, and championing alternative perspectives which serve to exorcise the state mind we have been infused with. This will help to provide us with the tools we need to more effectively struggle against the state itself.

Utopian ideas promote alternative thinking in this fashion. The novels I plan to study put the dominant ideology of a society in a different light, and in so doing, provide an excellent critique of
our society. They also present sustainable alternatives to our normal way of life, which may in actuality be prescriptions for social movements in the future. This is why utopias are not fantastical, but revolutionary.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Selection of Novels

I analyze three novels: *Herland*, by Charlotte Perkins Gillman (1915), *Les Guerilleres*, by Monique Wittig (1969), and *Woman on the Edge of Time*, by Marge Piercy (1976). I chose these novels not only because they are feminist, but also because they presented analyses of our socio-economic systems. Each of the works I chose critiques western society in several different areas (for example, political systems and modes of production, deviance, decision making, sexuality, religion, etc.). I excluded works which confined their analysis to one specific institution, because the focus was too narrow for the proposes of this project. I also exclude novels set on other planets, because they present not an alternative lifestyle which has the capacity to form a sustainable alternative for human beings, but an entirely different world (e.g., *The Left Hand of Darkness*, by Ursula K. LeGuin). However insightful this world may be, the ecosystems of other planets are too different form our own to see the societies presented as a prescription for actual change. This is not to say that science fiction utopias do not have the power to affect thought. However, my focus concerning this thesis is the realm of possibility, the possibility of praxis. One question I asked myself when selecting novels for this project was, could this society
exist in real time? This is, perhaps, overly optimistic, yet it is still the perspective I have chosen to write from.

Another reason that I chose the three particular books is that they are dissimilar. I wanted to get a good cross-section of different perspectives of Utopian alternatives. The ideologies present in the different works vary widely, as do the time periods in which the books were written. Also, the writers have different ethnic back-grounds. I thought that a heterogeneous approach would make this thesis more rich and diverse than if I had decided to compare similar works.

All three of the books I chose deal primarily with issues surrounding the position of women, although two also involve central characters who belong to other marginalized groups. One of the novels' central theme involves the oppression of homosexuals in dominant culture, while the second examines the subordinate roles of people of color, the mentally ill, and the underclass.

The Utopian novels I have chosen include representatives of our current system (actual travellers in time or space in *Herland*, and *Woman on the Edge of Time*, and remnants of our stories or legends in *Les Guerilleres*) which are immediately juxtaposed to the utopian system presented. However, the characters living in the Utopian society have shifted form the status of other (the lower rung in the hierarchy) to the central status, because this is the primary system presented. To the people in alternative societies, our culture is as foreign as other cultures seem to us. Therefore, when the representatives attempt to explain our culture, what seems perfectly usual
to us seems to them to be unusual, frightening, or macabre.

How Analysis Will Proceed

I plan to show how these three novels deconstruct the institutional view provided us and give prescriptions for change in six key areas. These are: (1) sexuality, both heterosexuality and homosexuality; (2) community building; (3) religion; (4) decision making processes, political systems and modes of production; (5) crime, deviance and political conflict resolution; and (6) child rearing. I chose these six area in order to look both at broad socio-political institutions (in the cases of religion, political systems/modes of production, and deviance/conflict resolutions), and at the immediate (or vernacular) environment of the actors (in the cases of sexuality, community building, and child rearing). By showing how the politics of the domestic/vernacular sphere reflect those of the broader socio-economic sphere, I will demonstrate how the dominant ideology of a society affects how people perceive the world, as well as how they relate to others on a personal level.

Also, I believe that these six areas and their interchange present the most holistic approach to analysis of Utopias, while retaining enough attention to the specific phenomenon presented in the novels. By showing how broader structures influence the every day life and thought patterns of the characters, I hope to demonstrate more effectively that the same phenomenon exists in the here and now; i.e., environment produces both lifestyle and outlook.
Deconstruction as Method

Because I am focusing on how feminist utopian novelists deconstruct U.S. society, I have drawn a specific example from one of the novels itself to illustrate. It centralizes a point of view usually relegated to marginality, and in so doing, brings into question what we usually consider commonplace.

Charlotte Perkins Gillman (1915) creates a society solely of women in her novel Herland. She writes from the point of view of Vandyck Jennings, the male protagonist, and visitor to Herland.

And when we say women, we think female the sex. But to these women, in the unbroken sweep of this two-thousand year old feminine civilization, the word women called up all that big background, so far as they had gone in social development; and the world man meant to them only male--the sex. (p. 137)

Thus she deconstructs the term mankind or man as generic; a term which claims to include, while in reality excluding, women. By infusing the word woman with the power to mean all of humankind, Gillman shows that using man in this manner is not a natural, but a social, paradigm. The idea that either sex is the primary designator of the human race is subjective and situational, not fundamental or foundational as we are led to believe.

The malleability of perspective is one of my central concerns regarding this project, and much of my analysis will be in this vein.
CHAPTER IV

SYNOPSIS

Synopsis for the Three Books

Because this thesis will be difficult to follow for people unfamiliar with these particular novels, I have included a brief synopsis of each.

Woman on the Edge of Time and Herland

Connie Ramos, an impoverished Mexican American woman in her mid-thirties, is labelled insane and committed to a mental institution.

Not surprisingly, she is treated poorly both inside and outside the hospital. She is a pariah because of her race, sex, and socioeconomic status, and these are the reasons she is committed in the first place. It is obvious in the text that Connie is not insane. In fact, quite the opposite.

She is uniquely able to communicate with the year 2137. Specifically, with a woman named Luciente who is from a small village in Massachusetts called Mattapoisett. Through several visits with Luciente and her companions, Connie learns to love the people in Mattapoisett, as well as their egalitarian way of life.

The juxtaposition between Connie's own time and 2137 provides an interesting framework for critiquing the dominant paradigms of
but just as a clear-eyed, intelligent, perfectly honest, and well-meaning child will frequently jar one's self esteem by innocent questions, so did these women, without the slightest appearance of malice or satire, continually bring us points of discussion which we spent our best efforts in evading. (p. 62)

It would not do to delve into a discussion of Charlotte Perkins Gillman's *Herland* without bringing up the novel's exemplary power to deconstruct the male/female paradigm.

Gillman continually brings the reader back to the juxtaposition between the Herlander point-of-view and our own in regard to gender roles, and her protagonist, Vandyck Jennings, even reflects upon it (as in the above passages). The result of this is that Gillman speaks the primary deconstructionist credo at several points throughout the novel: What makes up common knowledge is developed in response to a situation, yet it is non-essential to the great process.

In the early twentieth century, three young male scientists--Vandyck Jennings (the protagonist of the story), Jeff Margrave, and Terry O. Nicholson--stumble upon evidence of a civilization not on any map.

They immediately arrange an expedition to investigate. This leads them to discovery of Herland, an all female society located in the distant reaches of the earth.

The story is primarily comprised of discourse between the three men and the women of Herland. The men stay for a time, exchanging culture and ideas with the women.

One of the most important things to know when looking at an
analysis of Herland is the country's creation myth, which is told to the three visitors to Herland as if it were History. Gillman provides no evidence to contradict this, so it is assumed that the reader will accept it as such:

The people of Herland began as a race with two biological genders, like all others. They lived high up in the mountain passes, their numbers small due to war and famine. While the whole fighting force was busy fortifying and defending the mountain pathway, there occurred a volcanic outburst which completely filled their only outlet--the mountain pass. With the entire army having been killed, small as it was, few men other than slaves were left alive. The slaves took this as a grand opportunity to rise in revolt. They killed the remaining men, the old women and the mothers, with the intention of taking possession of the country with the young women and girls.

The young women, however, had had enough. They summoned their anger and their desperate strength and slew their conquerors, as they had numbers that their enemy did not.

From this ruin, the remaining women began to build a country. They did the best they could with what they had, not expecting to survive past the current generation of women, until a miracle happened. One of the women became pregnant. As there were no men to be found in the country, they decided that it must be a direct gift of the gods. They "placed the proud mother in the Temple of Maaia--their goddess of motherhood" (Gillman, 1915, p. 56).

This woman bore four more children, all girls, five in all.
Each of those bore five of their own girl children, and so forth down through the generations. (NOTE: Eventually over-population became a threat and they willfully, through redirection of energy, began to bear only one child apiece.)

The novel ends when the men are asked to leave when the most aggressive of them, Terry, attempts to commit an act of violence against one of the Herlander women.

Les Guerilleres

Les Guerilleres is a tale of sex warfare. It is not one consistent tale from beginning to end--rather it is a series of snapshots, profiles. Her style says as much as do her actual words; form = content. It is exemplary post-modern.

The reader does not know where the country is located, or what ethnic background the women come from. Witting merely refers to them in a unit as the women, other than in the title--translated The Guerrillas. Les Guerilleres is a critique not only of political economic social structures, but also of mental ideological structures, especially as they manifest themselves in text.

Throughout the novel, Wittig will periodically invoke the large O--symbol of woman, of the vulval ring. It will be the only thing appearing on the page. Or else, she will draw a list of women's single forenames. Again, form = content.

Her intent is to disrupt, to sow seeds of disarray, to create anarchy in the textual realm. She succeeds.
CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF THREE BOOKS

Sexuality

Woman on the Edge of Time

Sybil, Connie's friend from the ward, tells Connie she had only ever had one sexual encounter. In this passage, she (Peirce, 1976) describes why: "Who wants to be a hole? Do you want to be a dumb hole people push things in or rub up against? As for sex, it reminded me of going to the dentist the only time I ever indulged" (p. 85).

Sybil's disgust with sex is clearly a dislike for being used. Used as a receptacle: a "dumb hole people push things into" (p. 86). This can be seen to stem from an ideology in which women are taught to be passive, submissive, and receptive. Women are taught to be acted upon, not to take action themselves. Sybil refuses, quite understandably, to let her body be used for the gratification of others. Her perception of sexuality, stemming from the dominant ideology, does not allow for mutual pleasure giving, and therefore she abstains.

The sexuality on Mattapoissett, however, does allow for mutual pleasure, and, in fact, encourages it.

One of the most important things about sexuality in Mattapoissett is the absence of a restrictive morality--such as the one present in our time--which tells people that sexual feelings in
general are negative. From the time they are children, people in Mattapoisett are brought up to do as they like with their bodies, as long as it does not involve pain or is uninvited.

On one of her visits (Peircy, 1976), Connie and her friends from the future happen across some children involved in sex play. Connie is shocked.

Aren't you going to stop them, she asks. The response she receives is one of general amusement. Magdalena dropped her arm and began to laugh and although Luciente tried for a moment to keep a straight face she began to laugh with her. Connie stopped, furious. They're babies! If they were playing with knives you'd stop them. What's wrong with you? Magdalena shook her head in wonder. They learn how to use knives. Mostly they learn sex from each other. If a child has trouble, we try to heal, to help, but, they can hurt each other! How? If a child is rough, the other children deal with that. If I notice a child bullying, I try to work with that child, the mothers and family, to strengthen better ways. (p. 138)

When Luciente asks Connie if she ever engaged in sex play as a child, Connie recounts her experiences. Her first experience was with her older brother Luis, who "had taken her pants down under the porch and poked at her with his fingers, finishing with warnings not to tell Mama" (p. 138). She recalls that she did not like the prodding by Luis, who'd kept his own pants on. However, further experiences with her younger brother, who Connie describes as her favorite, proved to be more favorable. She remembers that these experiences were few and far between, but that "every now and then they climbed into the old car up on blocks behind the chicken coop next door and touched each other wherever it felt best to touch" (p. 139). (Notice that Connie's pleasant experiences involved touching each
other where it felt good, whereas her negative experiences involved being prodded in much the same way that Sybil describes sex.)

Due to her good experiences with her brother Jose, Connie finally concedes. "Okay, maybe it don't hurt," she says, "But I know if I saw my daughter playing that way, I'd have to stop her. I'd feel so guilty if I didn't! I'd feel like a bad mother, a rotten mother" (p. 139).

Another way the people of Mattapoissett encourage healthy sexuality is by encouraging positive body image. There is no one type of physique that is considered attractive, or sexual. Everyone is viewed as being beautiful in his or her own way. The people of Mattapoissett do not feel compelled to, artificially or through malnutrition, alter their physical appearance, as the people of Connie's world do.

Connie's niece Dolly tells her that she looks terrific in the hospital because she lost weight, even though she lost it due to the hospital's poor conditions, and the influence of Thorazine causing her to lose her appetite. Her skin has become pale, and her lips cracked due to ill health, yet because she is thin, Dolly finds her beautiful. Dolly, herself, is on speed to help her lose weight, because in her profession (prostitution) it is necessary (she's also bleaching her hair and skin because her clients like her to look Anglo). She is consistently on edge and has poor concentration, but to be thin is the only way to be beautiful or desirable in Connie and Dolly's world.
Luciente, however, tells Connie that she's not looking so great when she sees her thin and in poor health. You're looking thin! Luciente reproved her, leaning close. You say that like it was bad. Isn't thin beautiful to you? I've been dumpy for three years. Not that I don't look as lousy as I feel in that bughouse. Jackrabbit is thin beautiful. Bee is big beautiful. Dawn is small beautiful.

(p. 97)

The standards for beauty in Mattapoisett are not as restrictive as they are in Connie's time. They are more apt to include health and happiness in their definitions, because people are viewed as people, not as objects.

Along similar lines, gender roles in Mattapoisett are not nearly as restrictive as they are in Connie's time. Due to the absence of a power differential between males and females, Luciente comments that she's never actually known a case of rape, although she's read about it. It seems particularly horrible to the people there, like cannibalism, she says.¹

Barring the uninvited, the people of Mattapoisett are quite free with their sexuality. There is no concept of marriage, and sexual love is no longer tied to parenting. Monogamy is not considered to be the ideal here, nor is it even the norm. Many of them have several lovers. Luciente, for instance, is sweet friends with Bee and also with Jackrabbit, and jealousy does not play a factor in disrupting either relationship. She also has occasional liaisons with an exlover, a woman named Diana. Bee, on the other hand, is lovers not only with Luciente, but also with a woman named Erzulia, and later on with Connie herself. Jackrabbit has dozens of lovers, among them a young man named Bolivar.
The openness regarding sexuality, and particularly homosexuality surprises Connie. When she first meets Luciente, she cannot tell if she is a man or a woman—and therefore assumes she is a man. It doesn't help Connie with her confusion to find that Luciente has had lovers of both sexes. Thinking that Luciente is male, she asks her if she likes women. Luciente replies that although the most intense sexual relationship of her life was with a Diana, mostly she's been with males. Based on this information, Connie assumes that Luciente is a gay man. Later on, when Connie discovers that she is, in actuality, female, the first thing that comes to her mind is that she's "one of those Chicana dykes who hangs out shooting pool and cursing like men, passing comments on the women who walk by" (p. 67). Notice how part of Connie's idea of gender includes sexual orientation, and how when she thinks Luci is a man she is gay, and when she finds that she is a woman, she immediately pegs her for a lesbian. This is because in Connie's time, heterosexuality is not only the norm, but it is practically demanded. There isn't much difference in the level of deviance between a bisexual and a homosexual in Connie's time, so, no matter if Luciente is male or female, Connie identifies her as homosexual.

This is one of the things about Mattapoisett that is most difficult for Connie to get used to. Even near the end of the book, when Luciente and Bolivar (who are both Jackrabbit's lovers) sit down for a worming (that is, a talk to try to work out the hostility between them so they can learn to get along) Connie brings up the fact
to Parra, the facilitator, that no one seems concerned with the fact that Jackrabbit and Bolivar are both men, and this might bother a woman more than if Jackrabbit had another female lover. To this Parra replies, "But why? Parra looked at her as if she were really crazy. All coupling, all befriending goes on between biological males, biological females, or both. That's not a useful set of categories" (p. 214).

Piercy shows the link between broader social systems and sexuality in some more subtle ways as well.

Jackrabbit, for instance, is a somewhat prominent artist in Mattapoisett, and one of his holies consists of

images having something to do with the ocean and with sex and with power—not power over people, but natural power, energy. Boundaries dissolving. The sea rising, smashing into the land. Under a clear cold blue sky a sea lashed itself into foam and sprang at the shore. Waves with teeth that glinted and hair that tangles and tossed roiled over itself. Wave breaking over wave showed dark bellies arching before they crashed down in froth and slid on the sand spent and hissed dribbling back. (p. 264)

This piece of work shows the importance of natural power to the people of Mattapoisett. The power they experience is fluid, they move with each other and with their environment, a fact as apparent in their egalitarian sexual relationships as it is in their consensus politics. One is a reflection of the other. They are not isolate.

Piercy also portrays the adverse, the connection between sex and power-over in Connie's time, equally as subtly. When Connie attempts to escape the hospital, to avoid medical experiments, she walks for miles and miles, spending the night in a small patch of
woods, until she finally makes it to a bus station. Not knowing which schedule is which, she is forced to ask the attendant questions. He is irritated that she interrupted his book, a book with two naked women embracing while a man about eight feet tall dressed all in black leather cracked a whip around them on the cover.

Eventually he calls security and she is taken back to her ward.

Herland

Sexuality in Herland (Gillman, 1915) is nonexistent. The protagonist, Vandyck, informs the reader that the women of Herland have "practically no sex feeling to appeal to," and that "two thousand years' distance had left very little of the instinct" (p. 92).

In fact, the women of Herland are not only portrayed as asexual, but they seem to find sexuality monstrously distasteful. Women who had these urges were considered deviants. When VanDyck tries to explain to Ellador, his Herlander companion, the virtues of lovemaking between a monogamous couple for the sake of mere pleasure, she replies, "but--but--it seems so against nature!" (p. 138).

Part of the explanation for this view might be the time period in which Gillman was writing--it was unheard of to talk about sexuality (and particularly female sexuality) in the early twentieth century.

However, most of the reason for the asexuality of Herlander women is because sex is still associated with power--the power of the male over the female.
Vandyck Jennings, the protagonist of Herland, states: "I can see now clearly enough why a certain kind of man, like Sir Almroth Wright, resents the professional development of women. It gets in the way of the sex ideal; it temporarily covers and excludes femininity" (p. 130). On the adverse, the women of Herland (via Gillman) seem to see sex as something which gets in the way of their professional development--something to rob them of autonomy and keep them from power.

When the three men, Vandyck, Jeff and Terry, want to marry three of the young Herlander women, Ellador, Celis, and Alima, the women go into the arrangement to humor them. They have no idea what a marriage is or what it entails--because they have grown up utterly devoid of gender roles.

They discuss the Western tradition of 'maiden' and 'married' names in this passage.

Do your women have no manes before they are married? Celis suddenly demanded. Why yes, Jeff explained. They have their maiden manes--their father's names, that is. And what becomes of them? asked Alima. They change them for their husbands, my dear, Terry answered her. Change them? Do the husbands then take the wives' maiden names? Oh, no, he laughed. The man keeps his own and gives it to her, too. Then she just loses hers and takes a new one--how unpleasant! We won't do that! Alima said decidedly. (p. 118)

The loss women experience though sexual relationships is clearly and frequently expressed throughout the novel. Sex for the male is equated with victory; with conquest. Therefore, sex for the female is necessarily equated with defeat.

Terry, the most macho of the three, states his views on sex in
this vulgar passage.

There was never a woman yet that did not enjoy being mastered. All your pretty talk doesn't amount to a hill o' beans--I know. And Terry would hum, I've taken my fun where I found it. I've rogued and I've ranged in my time, and the things that I learned from the yellow and black they 'ave helped me a 'eap with the white. (p. 131)

When Alima turns him down again and again, he gets explosively angry. "To hear him rage you'd not have believed that he loved Alima at all--you'd have thought that she was some quarry he was pursuing, something to catch and conquer" (p. 131).

Indeed, this is the case. Sex is quarry to Terry, and (as it is implied in the novel) to most other men as well. Therefore the women of Herland refuse sexuality because they equate it with a loss of power. This is never outwardly stated int he novel--indeed it is never portrayed as anything but perfectly natural for the women of Herland to be asexual--but the implication is there.

Finally, Terry attempts to rape Alima. "Terry put in practice his pet conviction that a woman loves to be mastered, and by sheer brute force, in all the pride and passion of his intense masculinity, he tried to master this woman. It did not work" (p. 132).

It did not work because the women of Herland (unlike Western women) are not taught to be mastered, nor are they taught to be weak. Alima, fortunately, is capable of fighting with him while at the same time hailing her fellow, and the scene quickly shifts into something resembling a barroom brawn rather than an attempted rape. "When he swung a chair over his head one sprang in the air and caught it, two threw themselves bodily upon him and forced him to the floor"
The women, of course, are not tolerant of the attempt of force on Alima, and although Alima does not get her wish to see him put to death, they do expel Terry from Herland.

VanDyck mentions, however, that he does blame Alima somewhat, because she is "a shade more alluring." He remarks that "she had a far-descended atavistic trace of a more marked femaleness, never apparent 'till Terry called it out" (p. 130).

Whether this passage is purely satirical (merely pointing out the absurdity of victim blame) is not readily apparent. However, it seems to suggest that sexuality is equated with danger. If Alima had not been "a shade more alluring," it is implied that it this unfortunate turn of events may not have happened.

VanDyck explains his feelings for Ellador as loving up, that "these were women one had to love 'up', very high up, instead of down. They were not pets. They were not servants. They were not timid, inexperienced, weak" (p. 141). They are also not sexual. The definition of strength, by Herlander standards, does not include sexual expression.

Les Guerilleres

Daniela Nervi, while digging foundations, has unearthed a painting representing a young girl. She is all flat and white lying on one side. She has no clothes. Her breasts are barely visible on her torso. One of her legs, crossed over the other, raises her thigh, so concealing the pubis and vulva. Her long hair hides part of her shoulders. She is smiling. Her eyes are closed. She half leans on one
elbow. The other arm is crooked over her head, the hand holding a bunch of black grapes to her mouth. The women laugh at this. They say that Daniela Nervi has not yet dug up the knife without a blade that lacks a handle. (p. 23)

The painting of the young girl is a portrait of innocence, ignorance, shame. This is often the portrait of female sexuality we see in Western society--little girlish, with no hair or curves, eyes closed to make sure we don’t see the world around us.

Monique Wittig’s guerrillas laugh at this idea of women’s sex, saying that the innocent and the ashamed are less than nothing (the knife without a blade that lacks a handle).

After she invokes the image of women as little girl, she tears it up and reinvokes it in a new way.

The women say that they expose their genitals so that the sun may be reflected therein as in a mirror. They say that they retain its brilliance. They say that the pubic hair is like a spider’s web that captures the rays. They are seen running with great strides. They are all illuminated at their centre, starting from the pubes the hooded clitorides the folded double labia. The glare they shed when they stand still and turn to face one makes the eye turn elsewhere unable to stand the sight. (p. 19)

This view of women’s sexuality exults the physical, the sensual as well as reclaiming women’s sexual power. Wittig also associates the female and the physical with light--she describes the women as illuminated at their center.

Associating women and the sensual world with good and light is highly atypical because, as Derrida has said, in any given dichotomy there is not a peaceful coexistence of facing terms, but a violent hierarchy. It follows that the bottom half of the hierarchy (male/female, good/evil, mind/body, light/dark) are often associated with
each other. By deconstructing the portrait of female sexuality as little girlish, and then exulting women’s sex by affiliating it with good and light, Wittig is reversing a hierarchy. Thus, she shows how fragile the hierarchy, in actuality, is.

Wittig’s reversal of the sexual hierarchy is even more apparent in the following passage.

The women say that the glans of the clitoris and the body of the clitoris are described as hooded. It is stated that the prepuce at the base of the glans can travel the length of the organ exciting a keen sensation of pleasure. They say that the clitoris is an erectile organ. It is stated that it bifurcates to right and left, that it is angled, extending as two erectile bodies applied to the pubic bones. These two bodies are not visible. The whole constitutes an intensely erogenous zone that excites the entire genital, making it an organ impatient for pleasure. (p. 23)

This snapshot is immediately juxtaposed to yet another feeble image of female sexuality concocted from antique remnants of a dying civilization (presumably western civilization; the one they war with in the novel). The women, as before, find this portrayal beyond contemptible. It is so unfathomable that it is cartoonish.

There is the story of her who fell asleep for a hundred years from having wounded her finger with her spindle, the spindle being cited as the symbol of the clitoris. They say laughing that she must have been the freak spoken of elsewhere, she who, in place of a little pleasure-greedy tongue, had a poisonous sting. They say they do not understand why she was called the sleeping beauty. (p. 46)

Through the deconstruction of romantic fairy tales (a tool by which many women in western society learn how to have sexual relationships), Wittig wipes away all traces of the female as passive and swooning. She cleans off all traces of the derogatory as associated with female sexuality, sweeps away all negative connotation and
infuses women's sex with strength, beauty and power.

Furthermore, in several places throughout the novel, Wittig invokes the vulva, always using powerful or beautiful metaphors for it, such as golden fleece, violets, sea-urchins, starfish, whorled shells, etc.

Because Wittig's work is poetic and musing rather than a straight text, she does little to describe specific sexual relationships between the women. However, it is doubtful that monogamy is the norm, simply because the women's lifestyle is purposefully chaotic (see section V, Decision making, Political Systems and Production), and she does provide this critique of marriage.

Iron plunged into ice is cold but colder still is the lot of the young girl who has given herself in marriage. The young girl in the house of her mother is like seed in fertile ground. The woman under the roof of her husband is like a chained dog. (p. 108)

All in all, Wittig's critique of sexuality in Western society is very much a critique of structure and of social mores that devalue the body and the feminine. Instead, she paints an empowered view of women's sexuality that allows for freedom of expression and the ability to joy in the sensual world.

Economy and Political Systems

Woman On the Edge of Time

The political-economy of Mattapoisett would best be described as anarchy-syndicalism. They are also decidedly resource conscious, and exhibit great concern for the eco-system as whole (a fact which
is omni-present in all their political decision making processes).

The first reaction Connie has when visiting Mattapoisett is, "you sure we went in the right direction? Into the future?" (p. 68).

The pastoral scene that greets Connie upon her arrival does not fit her vision of the future. Like most people in Western society circa 1976 (and still today), Connie's definition of progress, and hence her vision of the future, is highly technological. She marvels at the fact that there are "no skyscrapers, no spaceports, no traffic jam in the sky" (p. 68). She asks Luciente if she lives way out in the sticks, and if they went to a big city would it be more modern? Luciente replies simply that big cities didn't work, so they don't have them anymore.

Connie thinks this is exceedingly strange, and refers to her journey as having gone forward into the past. When she sees ordinary goats grazing in a field, she explodes.

Goats! Jesus Y Maria, this place is like my Tio Manuel's in Texas. A bunch of wetback refugees! Goats, chickens running around, a lot of huts scavenged out of real houses and the white folks garbage. All that lacks is a couple of old cars up on blocks in the yard! (p. 70)

When Connie sees more, she discovers that, amidst the agrarian-based organization of the village, there is, indeed, some highly sophisticated technology in Mattapoisett. It is, however, limited. After seeing a pillow factory which is entirely automated except for an analyzer who oversees it, Connie, befuddled, asks Luciente, "Okay, you can automate a whole factory, so why do I see people grubbing
around broccoli plants picking of caterpillars? Why is everyone running around on foot or on bicycles?" (p. 129).

Luciente replies:

We have so much energy from the sun, so much from wind, so much from decomposing wastes, so much from the waves, so much from the river, so much from alcohol from wood, so much from wood gas, that's a fixed amount. Manufacturing and mining are better done by machines. Who wants to go deep into the earth and crawl through tunnels breathing rock dust and never seeing the sun? Who wants to sit in a factory sewing the same four or five comforter patterns? (p. 130)

The people of Mattapoisett are meticulously conscious of resource management, of the effects of any action on the ecosystem as a whole. This also shows that they are conscious of the wants and needs of their fellows. They delegate some of their precious resources to create automated factories to do the scud work--work no one wants to do.

This, however, does not mean the people of Mattapoisett never work, although at first it seems so to Connie. "Why isn't anybody in a hurry?" she demands to Luciente and Jackrabbit. "Why are the kids always underfoot? How can you waste so much time talking?"

To which Jackrabbit replies, while waving his arms around in windmill fashion,

how many hours does it take to grow food and make useful objects? Beyond that we care for our brooder, cook in our fooder, care for animals, do basic routines like cleaning, politic and meet. That leaves hours to talk, to study, to play, to love, to enjoy the river. (p. 128)

Seeing Connie's screwed up face of confusion, Luciente explains, "at spring planting, at harvest, when storms come, when some
crisis strikes, Connie, we work, we stiff it 'till we drop" (p. 128). She goes on to explain how, right after the revolution, people had to stiff it all the time in order to turn things over and change them. Everything was such a mess, she says, that they needed all their energy to clean it up. "Now we don't have to comp it that hard in ordintime," (p. 129) she tells her.

In short, the people in Mattapoisett work for necessities, and such necessities are shared throughout the community. The people there do not compete for basic needs. Food, clothing, shelter, etc., are accessible to all, and no one has control over the resources and means of production but the people themselves. Everyone has a stake and a say in how things are organized, how resources are used, and how work gets done. Everyone participates in the production of such necessities as well (the work that is not automated, that is).

When Jackrabbit is getting ready to leave to take his turn on defense, Connie says, "your society doesn't think much of art and artist and all that, do you?" (p. 266). When Luciente asks her why she thinks such a thing, Connie replies that, although Jackrabbit is a talented and prominent artist, he still has to "work in the fields and go to the army and cook and all that" (p. 266).

To which Luciente replies:

But I myself am a real geneticist and I have to defend and dig potatoes and cook and all that. I also eat and make political choices and rely on those in arms to defend me--as does Jackrabbit. Zo? (pp. 266-267)

So each individual has a variety of skills, which include general skills (the every day business of survival) and specialized
skills (Luciente is a geneticist and Jackrabbit is an artist). This makes the people of Mattapoisett quite self-sufficient.

Each region (or village, or community) attempts to be self-sufficient as well. They try to be own-fed, that is, they like to produce their own proteins, rather than relying on imports from elsewhere. They are not dependent on a small portion of the population to supply food. Like everything else, they all have a stake in making sure everyone eats. Luciente tells Connie that "until former colonies are equal in production, mammal meat is an inefficient use of grains" (p. 128). When Connie asks if the people in her village never eat meat, Luciente replies that they do in fact, eat meat on special occasions (and there are a lot of those).

Mattapoisett also has high production in other areas. Luciente gives Connie the rundown:

Mattapoisett exports protein in flounder, herring, alewives, turtles, geese, ducks, our own blue cheese. We manufacture goose-down jackets, comforters and pillows. We're the plant-breeding center for this whole sector in squash, cucumbers, beans, and corn. We build jizers, diving equipment, and the best nets this side of Orleans, on the Cape. On top we export beautiful poems, artwork, holies, rituals, and a new style of cooking turtle soups and stews. (p. 128)

All of the things that Luciente mentions are available to everyone in the community. The Mattapoisett economy is essentially communistic. The philosophy behind it seems to be one best illustrated by Karl Marx (Abercrombie, 1980), "work according to one's ability, take according to one's need" (p. 35).

When Luciente tells Connie that "this money complicates your
lives," in reference to the economy of Connie's time where she finds difficulty obtaining food if she can't produce the proper payment. Connie reminds Luciente that the people of their time have "those credits" (p. 246).

Luciente explains,

luxuries are scarce. There is only so much Bordeaux, so much caviar, so much Altiplana gray cheese. Necessities are not scarce. We grow enough food. But their are things no one needs that people enjoy. We try to spread them around. In our region we each get a fixed number of luxury credits. We can spend them all on some really rare luxury--a bottle of great old wine like a 2098 vintage Port for my birthday--or we can have many little treats. (pp. 247-248)

Because their economy is not consumer intensive, the acquiring of material goods is not a priority. In Connie's time (our own) the buying and selling of commodities is the foundation of the system. Therefore, corporations attempt, as a marketing technique, to turn things that are not basic needs into necessities. Connie says that she would spend most of her credits on clothes, and Luciente replies that they all have "warm coats and good rain gear. Work clothes that wear well" (p. 249). When Connie makes the point that some clothes are better than others, Luciente is at first confused as to what she means, then tells her that costumes circulate and can be borrowed by anyone, for a celebration.

Another factor that influences the seemingly large amount of time people in Mattapoisett seem to have at their leisure is the fact that they have eliminated unnecessary jobs. "We dumped the jobs telling people what to do, counting money and moving it about, making people do what they don't want or bashing them for doing what they
Luciente tells Connie that they did this because the people there don’t believe that "telling people what to do is a real world skill" (p. 123).

When Connie asks for clarification, "some people know how to run a lab and some people don’t, right?" (p. 123).

Luciente tells her, "Whenever we decide we’re ripe to join a work base, we fuse as full members. We share the exciting jobs and the dull jobs" (p. 123).

She explains to connie how people in her society rotate jobs. She stresses that after serving in a way which seems important, or acting in a position which effects the lives of many people (in the case of a coordinating job, for instance), the people in her time usually do some very simple work usually done by young people waiting to begin an apprenticeship. This is important to prevent an established hierarchy from setting in, as well as to debrief people so they do not become accustomed to serving in an important way. The people in Luci’s time take on a coordinating job they say this pledge, "The need exists. I serve the need. After me the need will exist and the need will be served. Let me do well what has and will be done as well by others. Let me take on the role and then let it go" (pp. 251-252).

This pledge shows that it is as important for the people in Mattapoisett to retain political autonomy as it is for them to have economic autonomy. They rotate their jobs in government (which is a
non-centralized government, if it can be referred to as a government at all) between all members of the community, and everyone in their society has a say in the decision making process.

The planning council for the township is chosen by lot. The people chosen do it for a year, three months with the representative before them, three with the person replacing them, and six alone.

They also have an earth advocate, who speaks for the rights of the total environment, and an animal advocate. These reps are not chosen by lot, but by dream. That is, every year a few people will dream they are the new Animal Advocate or Earth Advocate. They come together and the choice among them falls by lot.

This process again shows how the people in Mattapoisett are extremely aware of the effects of actions and processes on their surroundings, and on other people. No one tells anyone else what to do, not even in government. There are no leaders and no followers. No one is thought incapable of doing a particular job. In fact, everyone is expected to take partial responsibility for the well being of the community. Apathy is heavily frowned upon.

Connie, not used to such a process, asks Luciente how it is that ordinary people such as she herself could make such major decisions, and Luciente replies,

of course you could decide. It affects you--how not? A rep from the base talks. On the local level for a small proj. But it it's a major project--such as research on prolonging life would be--then everybody decides. What it would cost to begin. What it would use up in the way of resources and labor. All that would be set out. What would be consequences on the whole yan and ying on it, that we could foresee or guess. (p. 277)
Connie also wants to know where the final decision comes from. Luciente replies that there is no final authority. "We argue 'till we close to agree. We just continue. Oh, it's disgusting sometimes. It bottoms you" (p. 278).

She goes on to add that after a big political fight, the winners have to feed the losers and bring presents.

This consensus based decision making, as well as the bonhomie between opposing sides, shows again the value placed on collective autonomy in Mattapoisett. Although a tightly knit community based no a communistic economy and anarcho-syndicalist politics, personal responsibility in Mattapoisett is encouraged, and individuality is ripe and diverse. This is a dramatic juxtaposition to Connie’s time, where the ideology of individualism is bolstered by a reality that robs people of their voice in the decision making process, and implicitly encourages apathy and conformity.

Herland

Herland has a primarily socialist political economy. Although precise logistics of how government works is lacking in the work, enough is said about the general philosophy behind decision making in Herland to infer that it is, indeed, Progressive.

For instance,

very early they recognized the need of improvement as well as of mere repetition, and devoted their unbiased intelligence to that problem--how to make the best kind of people. First this was merely the hope of bearing better ones, and then they recognized that however the children differed at birth, the real growth lay later--through education. (p. 59)
The theme of constant reform, re-evaluation and improvement of current conditions is a prominent theme in the work, from genetic engineering of plants, animals and people to the education of the children, to the law making process.

Moadine, Terry's grandmotherly mentor, informs him, for example, "that Herland has no laws under a hundred years old, and most laws are under twenty" (p. 63). This falls in line with the philosophy that the current state of things can always be improved upon.

This conviction has resulted in, among other things, a meticulous and efficient use of natural resources. Food production, for instance,

I had never seen, had scarcely imagined, human beings undertaking such a work as the deliberate replanting of an entire forest area with different kinds of trees. Yet this seemed to them the simplest common sense, like a man's plowing up an inferior lawn and reseeding it. Now every tree bore fruit—edible fruit that is. They had early decided that trees were the best food plants, requiring far less labor in tilling the soil, and bearing a larger amount of food for the same ground space; also doing much to preserve and enrich the soil. (p. 79)

The women of Herland receive nearly all of their sustenance from these trees. They live on a wholly vegetarian diet, and in fact, when the three visitors explain the meat business to them, they find it disgusting. In this passage, (Gillman, 1915) Vandyck attempts to explain to Sommel, a Herlander woman, how animals are used as a resource in our society.

The farmer milks the cow, says he. Has the cow no child? says she. Of course, a calf, that is, says he. Is there milk for the calf and you, too? says she. It took some time to make clear to those three sweet-faced women the
process which robs the cow of her calf, and the calf of its true food; and the talk led us into a further discussion of the meat business. They heard it out, looking very white, and presently begged to be excused. (p. 48)

This implies that, as well as the exorbitant waste of resources ensuing from the meat business, they are also horrified at the inhumane treatment that the animals themselves receive. The women of Herland, although they have "no wild beasts and few tame ones" (p. 49), would never think of treating their animals cruelly. One of the most frequently seen animals in Herland is the cat, which the women describe as healthy, happy, and friendly. They keep the males segregated from the females, and only have a mating season once a year. This assures that they only have the number of animals that they can care for.

As in all societies, the treatment that the animals and environment receive from the Herlanders is reflective of the way they treat their own citizens. In Herlander history, there was a time when the country was in danger of becoming overpopulated. How did they solve this dilemma? According to Gillman (1915),

not by a 'struggle for existence' which would result in an everlasting mass of underbred people trying to get ahead of one another--some few on top, temporarily, any constantly crushed out underneath, a hopeless substratum of paupers and degenerates, and no serenity or peace for anyone, no possibility for really noble qualities among the people at large. (p. 68)

They simply sat down in council, decided how many people their country could comfortably support with the standard of peace, comfort, health, beauty and progress they demanded, and decided that they wouldn't have any more children than that.
Thus Gillman deftly deconstructs the idea of nature as a war of all against all and shows this idea to be a myth, a situational convenience, rather than a fundamental truth. She also shows how caring for the well being of a community infuses all spheres of a society. If a society is prone to elevating one group or aspect at the expense of another (i.e., humans at the expense of animals, the rich at the expense of the poor), this will effect the society's entire perspective. She shows then, how the malaise of hierarchy runs more deeply than class structure; how class structure is merely symptomatic of established hierarchical thinking.

Gillman (1915) sums it up beautifully when she writes, "you see, they had no wars. They had no kings, no priests, and no aristocracies. They were sisters, and as they grew, they grew together—not by competition, but by united action" (p. 60).

**Les Guerilleres**

They say that they foster disorder in all its forms. Confusion troubles violent debates disarray upsets disturbances incoherences irregularities divergences complications disagreements discords clashes polemics discussions contentions brawls disputes conflicts routs debacles cataclysms disturbances quarrels agitation turbulence conflagrations chaos anarchy. (p. 93)

This is the main philosophy behind decision making in Les Guerilleres. In short, there are no written systems or established institutions. There is no centralized government; in fact, there is almost no organization to speak of at all. However, the lack of order/structure is deliberate. It is a political tactic on the part
of the women to free their minds from the compartmentalized sign
systems (stimulus responses) that we are brought up to believe cer­
tain objects actions phenomena signify. This is stated quite expli­
citly in the novel itself: "They say that there is no reality before
it has been given shape by words rules regulations. They say that in
what concerns them everything has to be remade starting from basic
principles" (p. 134).

The first thing then, and the aspect that Monique Wittig cen­
ters upon, is to de(con)struct the systems that got us into this mess
in the first place--both the physical and also the mental systems.
The following scene portrays the women razing all the traditional
symbols of femininity to the ground, leaving them with the nothing
they need to begin again.

Things being in this state, they summon the trades. Di­
staffs looms rollers shuttles combs point-paper presses
cams cloth toiles cashmere twill calico crepe chintz satin
spools of thread sewing-machines typewriters reams of paper
stenographers' pads ink-bottles knitting-needles ironing­
boards. They heap them on to an immense pyre to which they
set fire, blowing up everything that will not burn. (p. 73)

The women's country in the novel is in a constant state of fes­
tival, chaotic, uncontrollable, unregulatable. They are often por­
trayed as drunk or drugged. She mentions narcotics, aphrodisiacs;
hashish, opium; and alcohol. She says that the "odour of drugs
stagnates on the square, sickeningly sweet" (p. 20).

Many times the women are in such a state of frenzy as to de­
stroy their own productions, which throws their economy (if it indeed
can be called an economy) into a state of turmoil. They must
continually produce new goods because what they have is constantly being destroyed by the spontaneity of their lifestyle.

However, there are a couple of constants. The women are vegetarians. The women "say that they could not eat animals," (p. 97). Also, Wittig describes the fruit and vegetables of the women's diet in considerable detail. Among other things, "the women eat orange oranges, ochre, pineapples, mandarins, walnuts, green and pink mangos, blue nectarines, green and pink peaches, orange-yellow apricots" (p. 11).

Another constant is that the women are highly intellectual, and they critique the dominant theories of the other lands with remarkable sophistication of thought. It has come to the point in the women's country that they can barely relate to these theories, however. They can no longer even take them seriously.

They say this is a concept which is the product of mechanistic reasoning. It develops a series of terms which are systematically related to opposite terms. It's theses are so crass that the thought of them makes the women start laughing violently. (p. 80)

They argue vehemently against any trace of the old paradigm in their thought. For instance, news has arrived from the assembly that is compiling the dictionary. The example proposed to illustrate the word hate has been rejected. It concerns a phrase of Anne-Louise Germaine, The women have transformed hate into energy and energy into hate. It has been adduced as a reason that the phrase contains an antithesis and therefore lacks precision. Then the women get angry saying that an antithesis is indeed involved and why has it not been suppressed, retaining the first part which alone has any meaning. (p. 76)

It seems then, that the lack of organization in the women's
land is purposive. It is in order to remake the world, beginning from ground zero. It is to blow away the old to make ready for the new. It is to make certain that the remnants of the old order are excorciized from all thought and action in order to leave enough room to plant a new seed.

Crime, Deviance and Political Conflict Resolution

Woman on the Edge of Time

The notions of evil in Mattapoisett center around power and greed, "taking from other people their food, their liberty, their health, their land, their customs, their pride" (p. 139).

They recognize structural violence as criminal activity, and any power-over motivations which rob people of autonomy. Therefore, where Connie is thought of in her own time as a violent hard case, certifiably insane, by the standards of Luciente's time she is a victim.

Luciente discusses her views on violence in this passage.

Power is violence. When did it get destroyed peacefully? We all fight when we're back to the wall--or to tear down a wall. You know we kill people who choose twice to hurt others. We don't think it's right to kill them. Only convenient. Nobody wants to stand guard over another. (p. 123)

This implies that it is not only life that is sacred to them, but also the quality of life. Oppression is more cruel than death to the people in Mattapoisett, a point which is obvious in the prayer that the revolutionaries say before combat (the tail end of the
revolution is still being fought, although far away from Connie's village) "forgive me if you are living and I kill you" (p. 124).

Part of the reason that oppression is more cruel than death to them, in addition to the mutual respect they accord one another and the importance of autonomy in their community, is that they recognize death as a natural process. Death is not horrifying to them, they recognize it as a part of life. Connie finds this bizarre.

You still get sick. You grow old. You die. I thought in a hundred and fifty years some of these problems would be solved, anyhow! But Connie, some problems you solve only if you stop being human, become metal, plastic, robot computer. Is dying itself a problem? (p. 125)

Their acceptance of death is also apparent in the way the people in Mattapoisett deal with criminals. Despite relatively low crime rates, crime does, in fact, exist. Imprisonment is not a punishment, however. There are no jails. "Nobody want to stand guard over another," (p. 370) as Luciente says.

Their criminal justice system works as follows: Upon a first offense, the offender is asked whether she/he will take responsibility for the act. If the answer is no, "then the people of Mattapoisett work on healing. They try to help so that never again will person do a thing person didn't mean to do" (p. 209). If the answer if yes, the offender, the victim (or family representative if the charge is murder) and the acting judge work out a sentence, or atonement. "Maybe exile, remote labor. Shepherding. Life on shipboard. Space service" (p. 209).

This might seem particularly light. However, the second time a
person commits a violent crime there is nonesuch lenience. The penalty is death. Parra explains it to Connie this way. "Second time someone uses violence we give up. We don’t want to watch each other or to imprison each other. We aren’t willing to live with people who choose to use violence. We execute them" (p. 209). If the offender denies the crime, an investigator is chosen by lot. When the investigator thinks a crosser has been found, they have a trial. There are no lawyers. A jury decides.

Not all their dealings with deviance, however, are so severe. On an every day level, the people of Mattapoissett use peer pressure if someone is not performing his/her responsibilities.

Suppose I just don’t want to get up in the morning? Then I must do your work on top of my own if I’m in your base. Or in your family, I must do your defense or your childcare. I’ll come to mind that. Who wants to be resented? Such people are asked to leave and they may wander from village to village sourer and more self-pitying as they go. We sadden at it. (p. 101)

All in all, the way the people deal with crime and deviance here speaks of a strong sense of personal responsibility, respect for people’s autonomy, and a certain amount of trust.

Herland

The women of Herland are pacifists. There is no violence whatsoever apparent in Herland, the extent of physical force used to stop a criminal is restraint and anesthesia.

When the three men are caught invading Herland for the first time, each of them are "seized by five women, each holding arm or leg
or hand; they were lifted like children, straddling helpless children, and borne onward, wriggling indeed, but most ineffectually" (p. 23). Then they are anesthetized.

When they awake, they are treated hospitably. They are neither verbally nor physically abused in any way. In fact, the women are more than polite, and the accommodations are as if the three men were invited guests.

"They haven't hurt us in the least! Van exclaims to his fellows, They could have killed us--or--or anything--and I never felt better in my life" (p. 25).

This treatment of the hostages continues, and even though the men attempt to escape, and attempt to fight when recaptured (Terry even goes so far as to fire a gun into the air to shock them) the women are consistently polite. Their only purpose in holding them there, they explain when the men have enough grasp on the language, is to exchange ideas--to teach and to learn.

One of the first things that the three men ask the women is, "What are the civilization's greatest faults, i.e., where is the crime?" Herlander society seems far too peaceful and prosperous for the pragmatic sociologist, Van, and he is anxious to find out where they hide away their social deviants. Sommel, Van's herlander mentor, explains that it has been "six-hundred years since [they] have had a criminal." She tells him that this is due to genetic engineering.

We have, of course, made it our first business to train
out, to breed out, when possible, the lowest types. Breed out? I asked, How could you--with parthenogenesis? If the girl showing the bad qualities had still the power to appreciate social duty, we appealed to her, by that, to renounce motherhood. (p. 82)

So, part of the way the Herlanders keep their crime rate low is through genetic engineering. It is also implied in the novel that part of the reason the crime rate is so low is because there are no men in Herland. "These stalwart virgins had no men to fear," Van explains, "and therefore no need of protection" (p. 56).

However, biology is far from the whole story. Herlanders believe that environment is at least as important as genetic inheritance. They focus on preventative rather than punitive methods. This is illustrated in this exchange between Van and Ellador:

Have you no punishments? Neither for children nor criminals--such mild criminals as you have?, I urged. Do you punish a person for a broken leg or a fever? We have preventive measures, and cures; sometimes we have to send the patient to bed, as it were; but that's not a punishment--it's only part of the treatment, she explained. (p. 112)

Although their method for doing this is not explained in any particular detail, we can see by the way that the three men were treated that it most likely involved counselling and some gentle but very firm peer pressure. Whatever the herlanders methods, it is certain that it would not include violence.

Even when Terry attempts to rape Alima, they do not physically harm him in any way (although it is mentioned that Alima was furious enough to want him killed). Instead, his sentence is permanent exile from Herland, contingent upon his promise that he would not reveal
the location of the country to the outside world. When Terry says that he will, or course, reveal the location of the country, the Herlanders come as close to violence as they get in the entire novel. They threaten to exterminate Terry with anesthesia if he does not comply. Eventually he does.

Although the details on this subject in the novel are sketchy, it is implied that their progressive culture has made crime almost non-existent in Herland. The underlying philosophy seems to be, when people are well nurtured and have plenty, the need for people to commit crimes becomes null.

**Les Guerilleres**

"The women affirm in triumph that all action is overthrow" (p. 107). This statement is the sum all of the women's philosophy behind conflict resolution. Every actin is political, every action strives to smash a social, political, or mental system which is rooted in oppression. The women are warriors--in their minds, in their everyday lives, as well as on the battlefield. This is the most important thing to keep in mind when discussing a theory of conflict in Les Guerilleres, the war reaches deeper than just physical combat. For instance,

the women say, I refuse henceforward to speak this language, I refuse to mumble after them the words lack of penis lack of money lack of insignia lack of name. I refuse to pronounce the names of possession and non-possession. They say, If I take over the world, let it be to dispossess myself of it immediately, let it be to forge new links between myself and the world. (p. 107)
However, the women’s country is a war torn land. Their enemies are external (they don’t have any criminals because they don’t have any laws) and the warrior women, the guerrillas, slay savagely and without mercy.

Their fighting style is as discordant as their social systems. They fight without fear or concern for pain or death. They do not treat prisoners well or consistently. Theirs is a capricious army; they are, indeed, Les Guerilleres.

The objective is not to gain ground but to destroy the greatest number of the enemy to annihilate his armament to compel him to move blindly never to grant him the initiative in engagements to harass him without pause. Using such tactics, to put an enemy out of action without killing him is to immobilize several individuals, the one who is wounded and those who bring aid, it is the best way to sow disarray. (p. 95)

However, the women never lose track of their ultimate aim (action overthrow). They do not fight after it has been established that an Other means no harm (physical mental oppression). "Like unto ourselves/men who open their mouths to speak/a thousand thanks to those who have understood our language/and not having found it excessive/have joined with us to transform the world" (p. 128).

Child Rearing

Woman On the Edge of Time

The child rearing process in Mattapoissett, as in all societies, reflects the cultural mindset—the values and norms prevalent in the society.
The nuclear family, the dominant method of child rearing in Connie's time, is nonexistent in Mattapoisett. This is understandable, because the structure of the nuclear family reflects the power relations of Connie's (our) society. A microcosm of the hierarchical social structure exists in nuclear families; the father has the most status, then the mother, then the children. Another thing that the nuclear family reflects is the isolation of people from each other—the lack of community. Children have only one primary caretaker in Connie's time—usually the mother—and most other adults are to be feared and mistrusted.

This is not so in Mattapoisett. In fact, not only is the nuclear family absent, but the idea of woman = mother is nonexistent as well. There is no word for 'father' in Luciente's society, both men and women are considered mothers. (Note: there are also no words for son or daughter, both male and female children are referred to only as children. Also, there are not separate pronouns for men and women, the generic pronoun is per or person.)

One of the ways in which Mattapoisett is highly technological is in their method of birth. Women no longer bear live. Instead, embryos grow in what Luciente's people call the brooder—a building Connie describes as being much like a "big aquarium" (p. 101). Every child has three mothers—coms, short for co-mothers, and the children aren't genetically tied to them. When a person feels he or she is ready to mother, she or he puts in for it.

Luciente explains it to Connie this way:
Finally there was that one thing we had to give up too, the only power we ever had, in return for no more power for anyone. The original production: the power to give birth. Cause as long as we were biologically enchained, we'd never be equal. And males never would be humanized to be loving and tender. So we all became mothers. Every child has three. To break the nuclear bonding. (p. 105)

However, the three co-mothers aren't the only ones responsible for the welfare of the children. The entire community is. Luciente is what is called a kid-binder, meaning she mothers everybody's kids.

To illustrate, after a party in Mattapoisett, Connie remarks, "the children are still up. It must be ten-thirty, eleven" (p. 183). Luciente tells her that if they doze off in the grass, someone will carry them home. Connie is amazed at the community's faith in other people, to which Luciente replies, "without that social faith, what a burden it would be to have children! The children are everyone's heirs, everyone's business, everyone's future" (p. 183).

This is reflected again when Connie remarks that it is amusing to see all the children's art on the walls in the dining hall--what they call the fooder--because "everybody wants to look at their own kid's pictures, but nobody wants to look at anybody else's" (p. 78). A man named Moringstar merely looks at her in puzzlement and says, "But they're all ours."

Another way the methods of child-rearing in Mattapoisett reflect the social systems is by empowering children. They are all taught autonomy at a young age, children are neither helpless nor useless. The schools in Mattapoisett consist of hands on experience, watching people doing real work and learning from it. When
Connie remarks that they couldn't possibly be learning as much as they would in a classroom with a book, Luciente replies,

the kids work with us. I think maybe growing up is less mysterious with us since the adult world isn't separate. What better place to learn anatomy than in a clinic? What better place to learn botany than in a field of corn? What better place to study mechanics than in a repair shop? (p. 132)

The fact that the children have real work to do is also an explanation for the lack of toys for older children that Connie marks. She, herself, could never afford expensive toys for her own daughter, and tells Luciente that, if she could afford it, she'd give her kids every toy in the world.

Magdalena, the head of the house of children, replies that, "when children aren't kept out of the real work, they don't have the same need for imitation things" (p. 137). (Note: The lack of toys also shows the lack of commodity fetishism in their society. In Mattapoisett, satisfying work, fulfilling relationships with other people, and leisure to pursue personal interests are more important than objects. This is so for the children as much as it is for the adults.)

Luciente doesn't quite understand the importance Connie places on the availability of toys for children, so Magdalena (who has studied the care of children in ages past) attempts to explain. "In that time, they had many toys for teaching sex roles to children. Children were kept in separate buildings all day and even after puberty were not supposed to begin full lives" (p. 138).
On the contrary, once a person reaches puberty in Mattapoi-sett, he/she IS supposed to begin a full life. They have a rite of passage called naming--because at the end of it, the child chooses her or his own name to signify that she or he has become a full member of society--that a young person goes through at the time of her or his own choosing, usually around puberty.

The adolescent is dropped at a designated point in the woods and picked up a week later. He/she is alone with his/her wits and survival skills. There is not one else to rely on. When the young person returns, the parents cannot speak to him/her for three months (to break the cycles of dependence), and the person chooses his/her own name. This is to signify the transition to adulthood.

Connie is aghast when she hears that the coming of age ritual involves actual danger.

Suppose she breaks a leg. Suppose she's bitten by a snake. Suppose she gets appendicitis! Bee smiled at her almost sadly. We take the chance. We have found no way to break dependencies without some risk. What we can't risk is our people remaining stuck in old patterns--quarreling through what you called adolescence. (pp. 115-116)

Later in the book, Innocente comes back Hawk, and is ready to begin a full life as an adult member of the community.

The way children are raised to be free thinking, responsible individuals in Mattapoisett is an obvious juxtaposition to the way they are raised during Connie's time. Thought of as nuisances, the children in our society are coddled, segregated, taught to be quiet and to stay out of the way. They are raised to be dependent on material objects for learning, and on their parents for sustenance.
Children raised this way grow into adults who are dependent on material goods, and on a system which buys their labor to produce goods which they have no stock in so that they can have the privilege of sustenance. In short, children who are taught to be dependent grow into disempowered adults, and children who are taught to be autonomous grow into empowered adults.

Connie realizes this when she dedicates her daughter Angelina, taken away from her by the state, to the people of Mattapoisett. (She does this because Luciente’s child Dawn bears a striking resemblance to Angie, so much so that she inadvertently breaks contact and begins to fade.)

Take her, keep her! I want to believe she is mine. I give her to Luciente to mother, with gladness I give her. She will never be broken as I was. She will be strange, but she will be glad and strong and she will not be afraid. She will have enough. She will have pride. She will love her own brown skin and be loved for her strength like a man and never sell her body and she will nurse her babies like a woman and live in love like a garden, like that children’s house of many colors. People of the rainbow with its end fixed in earth, I give her to you! (p. 120).

Herland

Children are the raison d’etre in the country of Herland. Their religion surrounds it, their world-view centers upon it, and every activity, no matter how small, can be traced back to a sublime awareness of the effect it will have on the children.

Moadine, long suffering mentor of the petulant Terry, sums up their views on the subject beautifully in this statement.
The children in this country are the center and focus of all our thoughts. Every step of our advance is always considered in it's effect on them--on the race. You see, we are Mothers, she repeated, as if in that she had said it all. (p. 66)

It must be pointed out here, that by, we are mothers, Moadine means that all of the women of Herland are mothers. This is less a biological fact than a social fact. The children are raised communally, with little emphasis placed on who the biological mother is--although each woman KNOWS the name of her biological mother. The nuclear family is non-existent in Herland, of course--all the Herlanders are women--so a little microcosm of a broader social structure in this case is a moot point. Still, there is no semblance of nuclear family. That is, a biological mother is not the only one to care for the child. Sommel remarks that "we each have a million children to love and serve--our children." To which Vandyck tells the reader, "It was beyond me. To hear a lot of women talk about our children! But I suppose that is the way the ants and bees would talk --do talk, maybe" (p. 71).

This passage points out, yet again, that the Herlanders have a strong hive mind, or group mindset that effects the child-rearing process.

Education is of the utmost importance in raising children as well. The Herlanders have a very few teachers--or those responsible for the education and general care of the children. It is described as the "supreme task, entrusted only to the most fit" (pp. 82-83).

Because maternity is so revered in Herland, a "majority of
girls eagerly try for [teaching positions]." The results of their emphasis on education can be plainly seen in the intellect of the women of Herland, who Vandyck describes as having "a highly developed mentality quite comparable to that of Ancient Greece" (p. 85). Also, many of the young women leave the three men stumped with their keen, inquiring, logical minds, a fact which is a bee in the obtrusive Terry's bonnet.

All in all, because maternity is so highly valued in Herland, much care is taken to be sure that it meets their rigorous standards.

Les Guerilleres

Like all other aspect of the women's lives in Les Guerilleres, child rearing is bound up in warriorhood, chaos, and violence.

The birthing process is far from peaceful. "When the child is born the midwife begins to utter cries like women who fight in battle. This means that the mother has conquered as a warrior and that she has captured a child" (p. 18).

Whether this is literal or figurative is not entirely clear from reading the text. It may imply that the women literally rape their male captives in order to conceive (there is no mention of native men in the country of the women--only those who have converted from other lands) or it may simply be a way of perceiving childbirth. Rather than perceiving it as women's duty, painful and humiliating but necessary, it is perceived here as being a mark of victory. This is a product of a women warrior's mindset.
There are relatively few specific details of child raising practices in the women's country, but it is clear that the girls are raised in the chaotic spirit of the land around them. There seems to be relatively little supervision, and not only are the little girls part of the discord/festival around them, they are even the butt of a few practical jokes.

Everyone may drink until she falls dead-drunk or until she has lost her self-control. Everyone drinks in silence standing or lying down on carpets unrolled in the street. Then they have the little girls brought out. They are seen standing half asleep bewildered hesitant. They are invited to try their strength on the whimpering outstretched bodies. The children go from one to the other trying to wake them up, using stones buckets of water, shouting with all their might, squatting down to be at the level of the ears of the sleeping women. (p. 20)

Children are in no way sheltered or coddled. The reader is left with the feeling that little girls are expected to become autonomous members of the women's society fairly quickly.

The following passage shows how children learn to deal with the results of their actions without much help or warning.

The little girls search in the bushes and trees for the nests of goldfinches chaffinches linnets. They find some green canaries which they cover with kisses, which they hug to their breasts. They run singing, they bound over the rocks. A hundred thousand of them return to their houses to cherish their birds. In their haste they clasped them too tightly to themselves. They removed the birds from their garments, they found them lifeless, heads drooping. Then a hundred thousand little girls bewailed the death of their green canaries in the hundred thousand rooms of the hundred thousand houses. (p. 25)

This passage also highlights the natural order--the children discover early on that living things die. The way that Wittig
portrays death, without much fanfare or enthusiasm on the part of her characters, is thus passed on to the children. They learn to accept that death is part of life.

All in all, the children are treated in much the same way as the adults in the women's country. The chaos in the child rearing process reflects the distinct lack of order in the broader society.

Religion

*Woman On the Edge of Time*

Because the culture of Luciente's time is so holistic, religion is not a separate system for the people in Mattapoisett. In other words, there is no split between secular and religious forms of thought— the secular IS religious, and vice-versa.

They do not worship gods, or even goddesses, nor do they have institutionalized religion. They have no temples, no churches, no prayers, no elaborate rituals—although life itself is ritualistic in Mattapoisett. The way they look at life, their perspective on the world, has an almost religious significance, but it is not separate from everyday life.

The only time the word 'religion' itself is used in the book is when Luciente attempts to explain why they are so conservative with resources to Connie. "We have limited resources. We plan cooperatively. We can afford to waste nothing. You might say our--you'd say religion—ideas make us see ourselves as partners with water, air, birds, fish, trees" (p. 125). Notice Luciente's confusion with
the term religion. The line between religion and ideas is so blurred that she is not sure if she is using the term correctly. This suggests that the mindset in Mattapoisett is intrinsically religious.

Also, the idea that people are partners with "water, air, birds, fish, trees" suggests pantheism, or the idea that God is not a personality, but that all laws, forces, manifestations of the self-existing world are god; that God is everything and everything is God. Perhaps it even suggests animism, or the notion that natural phenomena and objects (rocks, trees, wind, etc.) are alive and have souls. Whether pantheism or animism, the perspective that everything in the ecosystem forms a greater whole in which the actions of one unit affect everything else implies that everyday life—the social organization of Luciente's world, the political economy et al.—is infused with religious reverence.

The people of Mattapoisett have reverence for all natural processes, and seek to live in harmony with all other living things. Luciente exclaims to Connie, "We're part of the web of nature. Don't you find that beautiful?"

Connie replies, "Like dumb animals? No! Dust to dust and all that?" (p. 279).

Then,

we have a hundred ceremonies to heal us to the world we live in with so many others. Listen. Luciente waved toward the child and the old man, who had finished picking blackberries. They sang together as they got ready to leave: 'Thank you for the fruit, we take what we need. Other animals will eat. Thank you for the fruit, carrying your seed. What you give is sweet. Long live and spread!' We learn when we're kids to say that to every tree or bush we pick from. (p. 279)
Even the way Luciente’s people view death is reflective of this viewpoint. Connie finds their calm acceptance of death to be aberrant, but Luciente merely tells her,

Connie, your old way appears barbaric to us, trying to keep the rotting body. To pretend we are not made of elements ancient as the earth, that we do not owe those elements back to the web of all living. For us a good death is one come in the fullness of age, without much pain and in clear mind. (p. 162)

A religion which is cohesive with the natural world is a drastic contrast to the view of religion that Connie is used to. Generally, in western society, the spiritual is opposed to the physical—the natural world being identified with evil. As Derrida says, "in any philosophical opposition, we have not a peaceful coexistence of facing terms, but a violent hierarchy" (p. 165). Thus, dichotomy fosters hierarchy, and western religion is riddled with both. The spiritual is viewed as the desirable part of the dichotomy, and the physical is devalued. Reflexive of a hierarchical way of looking at the world, most western religions call for male supremacy and put women in a subordinate position, and draw a distinctive line between clergy and layperson. The clergy leads and the lay people are expected to follow in much the same way that the government leads and the populace is expected to follow. The religious systems of any society fall in with the political economy of that society, and both reflect the dominant ideology.

In short, it is no surprise that the people of Mattapoisett have a holistic, non-hierarchical religious viewpoint. Neither is it surprising that western society has a rigidly hierarchical, highly
segmented view of religion. Both systems of religion reflect the broader social systems involved.

Herland

Gillman describes the religion of Herland as Maternal Pantheism. Here was Mother Earth, bearing fruit. All that they ate was the fruit of motherhood, from seed or egg or their product. By motherhood they were born and by motherhood they lived--life was, to them, just the long cycle of motherhood. (p. 59)

This view on religion evolved from what was once a Pantheon--much like the religion of ancient Greece--but the people of Herland "lost all interest in deities of war and plunder, and gradually centered on their Mother Goddess altogether" (p. 59). The primary reason for this Maternal Pantheism, as indicated in the plot summary, is because they own their existence to an act of the gods--specifically, the Goddess of Motherhood.

The religion of Herland reflects the world view of the culture in other ways, as well. Van and Ellador have long been attempting to explain their different cultural world views to each other, and they spend a good deal of time talking about religion. This is how Van explains what he has pieced together from what Ellador has told him about Herlander religion.

She said she couldn't talk about the difference very intelligently, not being familiar with other religions, but that theirs seemed simple enough. Their great Mother Spirit was to them what their own motherhood was--only magnified beyond human limits. That meant that they felt beneath and behind them an upholding, unfailing, serviceable love--perhaps it was really the accumulated mother-love of the race they felt--but it was a Power. (pp. 111-112)
When he pushes her for clarification, asking if this is their theory of worship, Ellador becomes confused. Van himself, when attempting to explain what he means by the term 'worship, becomes equally confused. Finally he says merely, "surely your mothers expect honor, reverence, obedience from you." To which Ellador replies: "Oh, no, we do things from our others--not for them. We don't have to do things for them--they don't need it, you know" (p. 112).

It is obvious from Ellador's reaction that subjugation is foreign to her. The idea of God as a vengeful deity who punishes people for disobedience is not merely aberrant, it is utterly incomprehensible. The idea itself seems vague and strange.

When Van explains the theory of the devil and damnation, Ellador becomes very disturbed. She runs shuddering away from Van, into the nearest temple. This is what the priestess of the temple tells Ellador to calm her.

'Why, you blessed child,' she said, 'you've got the wrong idea altogether. You do not have to think that there ever was such a God--for there wasn't. Or such a happening--for there wasn't. Nor even that this hideous false idea was believed by anybody. But only this--that people who are utterly ignorant will believe anything--which you certainly knew before.' (p. 112)

In this passage, Gillman deftly shows both the subjectivity of religious ideas (which we are taught to view as absolute), and how religious ideas reflect the broader social systems involved. Ellador says that "we are not accustomed to horrible ideas." Because the Herlanders do not try to intimidate people into obedience, they have
little need for terrifying myths.

This is shown yet again when Van asks if they have no theory of eternal punishment. 'How could we?' she asked, fairly enough. 'We have no punishments in life, you see, so we don't imagine them after death' (p. 112).

Eternal life is an equally difficult concept for her to grasp. Van explains it as life going on forever, to which Ellador replies, "Oh--we see that, of course. Life does go on forever, all about us" (p. 116). When Van finally gets the point across, Ellador tells him that it is a silly idea. Van, rather offended, says, "But it means Heaven! Peace and Beauty and Comfort and Love--with God!"

To this, Ellador replies:

'Why Van--darling! How splendid of you to feel it so keenly. That's what we all want, of course--Peace and Beauty, and Comfort and Love--with God! And Progress too, remember; Growth, always and always. That is what our religion teaches us to want and to work for, and we do!' (p. 117)

In short, the women of Herland do not need thoughts of eternal life to comfort them. They are happy in the here and now.

Van finally concedes, when he tells Ellador. "I think you are far nearer right than we are" (p. 113).

Les Guerilleres

In traditional Western thought systems, religion has been highly oppressive to women. Christianity, a patriarchal religion of conquest, offers as it's only goddess figure the Catholic virgin Mary--an anemic goddess revered for only two things, (1) virginity,
and (2) motherhood. In this same vein, women traditionally have not been allowed in the clergy other than in positions of little power, and women lay persons have been encouraged to be subordinate to God, to the clergy, and to the men in their life. In short, traditional Western religion is rigidly hierarchical, and women make up part of the absolute bottom.

Wittig changes all that. True to form, the Religion portrayed in Les Guerilleres is revolutionary. Because every action taken in the novel is for the express purpose of reclaiming lost power and putting suppressive systems to the sword, it is hardly surprising that the religion among the guerrillas is a woman centered, warrior religion which encourages power, freedom, and dignity among women.

The women "abases [themselves] three times on the ground," striking it with their hands, calling to the sun goddess Amaterasu. Their prayer is this. "I salute you, great Amaterasu, in the name of our mother, in the name of those who are to come. Our kingdom come. May this order be destroyed. May the good and the evil be cast down" (p. 27).

Not only does this show how the struggle for freedom infuses all spheres of thought in the women's society, including the mythological belief structure, but it also reinforces the deconstructionist idea that dichotomy = hierarchy. The women scream for both the good and the evil to be cast down, presumably so there will no longer be that which can be labelled evil and thus, devalued. In short, they scream for an end to all dichotomies and hierarchies.
This is twice reinforced by the fact that the women are honoring a sun goddess, sun-light which is usually identified with male as opposed to moon = dark which is generally identified with female. By identifying women with light, Wittig is reversing a hierarchy and showing how it lies on a foundation of subjectivity.

This is not the only example of reclaiming religion for women in the novel. By far the most striking example of this is Sophie Menade’s tale, a reconstruction of the Garden of Eden myth.

Sophie Menade’s tale has to do with an orchard planted with trees of every colour. A naked women walks therein. Her beautiful body is black and shining. Her hair consists of slender mobile snakes which produce music at her every movement. This is the hortative head of hair. It is so called because it communicated by the mouths of its hundred thousand snakes with the woman wearing the headdress. Orpheus, the favorite snake of the woman who walks in the garden, keeps advising her to eat the fruit of the tree in the centre of the garden. The woman tastes the fruit of each tree asking Orpheus the snake how to recognize that which is good. The answer given is that it sparkles, that merely to look at it rejoices the heart. Or else the answer given is that, as soon as she has eaten the fruit, she will become taller, she will grow, her feet will not leave the ground through her forehead will touch the stars. And he Orpheus and the hundred thousand snakes of her headdress with extend from one side of her face to the other, they will afford her a brilliant crown, her eyes will become as pale as moons, she will acquire knowledge. Then the women besiege Sophie Menade with questions. Sophie Menade says that the woman of the orchard will have a clear understanding of the solar myth that all the texts have deliberately obscured. (p. 52)

In this retelling of the Garden of Eden myth, woman has power. There is no oppressive male god shouting commands as to what can and cannot be eaten, there is even no male companion to be tempted by the woman’s weakness. The snake is no longer the devious epitome of evil (there IS no evil), and even his status is reduced to advisor to the
shining black woman who's eyes have become as pale as moons and has been afforded a brilliant crown. She has, in effect, become the goddess by acquiring knowledge. It is notable, also, that the woman is black (usually the bottom half of a hierarchy), and she wears a headdress of snakes. This invokes the image of Meduesa, a powerful woman thought of as so ugly she turns all her viewers to stone. Here, she is beautiful and shining. Therefore, Wittig identifies woman's power (and also Black power) with beauty and divinity. In short, Wittig rewrites history. Sophie Menade asserts, with significant indignance, that this is the solar myth that "all the texts have deliberately obscured" (p. 52). This implies that this is the legitimate account of the event. By doing so, witting shows the subjectivity of interpretation as well as how religious myths serve to bolster the dominant ideology and reinforce the positions of those in power.

Wittig encourages us, though rethinking paradigms as well as rebuilding social structures, to take our power back. She implores us to look beyond the written word, deep down until we come face to face with our primal selves. She tells us that these are the basic principles we must begin with in order to remake the world. She speaks of ancient matriarchies in a fervent whisper, urging women to reclaim their power once had.

There was a time when you were not a slave, remember that. You walked alone, full of laughter, you bathed bare-bellied. You know how to avoid meeting a bear on the track. You know the winter fear when you hear the wolves gathering. You say there are no words to describe this time, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent. (p. 89)
Wittig has remembered/invented a women-centered religion, re-made from basic principles.

Community Building

Woman on the Edge of Time

"We learned a lot from societies that people used to call primitive," Jackrabbit tells Connie, "Primitive technically. But socially sophisticated. We tried to learn from cultures that dealt well with handling conflict, promoting cooperation, coming of age, growing a sense of community, getting sick, aging, going mad, dying" (p. 125).

The entire social organization in Mattapoisett speaks of this. They have been successful in arranging a system in which people have mutual respect for each other. Cooperation is much more prevalent in Mattapoisett than is conflict, and when conflict does take place, it is handled well.

For instance, when there is an intense amount of conflict in a personal relationship, they have what is called a worming. That is, the two people get together with their families and a referee to try and clear the air of their differences. Luciente and Bolivar have had a good deal of friction, and this is a problem, because Jackrabbit is close to both of them.

If the worming doesn’t succeed, and Luciente and Bolivar still can’t get along, then one or both of them might go into temporary wandering. The people in Mattapoisett might impose temporary
invisibility on them, which is to say that they would cease to have any communication whatsoever between them for a few months (in attempt to exasperate them into getting along when the silence was broken), or Jackrabbit might simply choose to see neither of them for awhile.

When Connie asks how the two can afford to put so much time and energy into resolving personal difficulties, Parra, the facilitator of the worming, answers,

we believe many actions fail because of inner tensions. To get revenge against someone an individual things wronged per, individuals have offered up nations to conquest. Individuals have devoted whole lives to pursuing vengeance. People have chosen defeat sooner than victory, with credit going to an enemy. The social fabric means a lot to us. In childhood we all learn a story about how an anthropologist asked a Pawnee to define bravery. Person said that White Cloud was the bravest individual person had ever known because when Laughing Bear slandered per, White Cloud had given Laughing Bear a horse. How is that brave? asked the anthropologist. The Pawnee said, But it was White Cloud’s only horse.’ ‘The community is precious. That’s what you’re saying.’ ‘Just so.’ Parra nodded, grinning. (p. 208)

This openness and consideration is taught to them from the time they are children. When Luciente is trying to teach Connie to fake unconsciousness so she can attempt to escape the mental hospital, Luci’s daughter Dawn keeps interrupting with questions for Connie about the past. Finally, this exchange takes place:

‘Keep quiet now or leave, Dawn. Connie must fix on escaping from the bad place that holds per against per will. Next week, if Connie escapes, person will answer all the questions you can ask.’ Dawn shut up. Connie said, ‘That’s the first time I heard anyone say no--you know, discipline a child here.’ ‘I have to explain. Dawn must comprend the situation. And per questions will be given time.’ (p. 228)
Thus, understanding, openness, and consideration play a large role in their cooperative efforts.

Connie is heavily censored in her own time. She is expected to follow orders and advice of specialists, or people in power, and her feelings are not considered. She has no power to voice her concerns, talk things out, or come to a consensus. People in Connie’s time are taught to obey. Cooperation is not important, social control is important.

This is evident when Connie is committed merely on Geraldo’s word that she hit him and beat up Dolly. They do not ask Connie her side of the story, they do not call a council to talk about it. They take the word of the seemingly lucid male (the person present with the most status) and lock Connie up. Her feelings are not important. The fact that she did not perform as expected is important. The method of resolving conflict in Connie’s time is punitive rather than preventative, and heavily slanted toward those higher up in the hierarchy.

In Mattapoisett, there are no people in power, and conflict resolution is highly preventative. As Parra has said, they try to keep inner tensions to a minimum, because if left to fester, they can cause systems to crumble.

Herland

"They themselves were a unit, a conscious group; they thought in terms of the community," Gillman (1915) writes, "As such, their
time-sense was not limited to the hopes and ambitions of an individual life. Therefore, they habitually considered and carried out plans for improvement which might cover centuries (p. 79).

Herland is distinguished by a strong progressive/socialist ideology. The Herlander community can be characterized by a hive mind, or a primary concern for the group as a whole. Individual welfare is seen as important, but less so than is the welfare of the society in its entirety. Also, individuals define themselves by their relationships to other groups members, so even individuality is characterized by the larger whole. An individual has a difficult time dissociating herself from the group in Herland. 'We' and 'we' and 'we' --it was so hard to get them to be personal (p. 126). Vandyck complains of his Herlander companion, Ellador.

Another thing that characterizes the Herlander mindset in regard to community is the distinct lack of competition--either for resources of for status.

They had games, too, a good many of them, but we found them rather uninteresting at first. It was like two people playing solitaire to see who would get it first; more like a race or a--a competitive examination, than a real game with some fight in it. (p. 32)

This reflects the mindset of a culture focused on cooperation rather than conflict, on harmony as opposed to war. The fact that mindset is shown to effect the type of recreation the people of Herland engage in shows just how vast and far-reaching dominant ideology is. With the above passage, Gillman points out that the evidence of a particular cultural mindset can be seen in all spheres, not only the
Another distinctly socialist fact of Herlander ideology is the lack of significance placed on material objects. Personal property, for example, is non-existent.

When Terry, the ladies man of the team, attempts to woo the Herlander women with material objects, this is how they react.

Terry's jewels and trinkets they prized as curios; handed them about, asking questions as to workmanship, not in the least as to value; and discussed not ownership, but which museum to put them in. (p. 89)

This, of course, infuriates the boorish and boisterously sexist Terry, as does the fact that his young female companion Alima, has no desire for a permanent home. "Our work takes us all around the country, we cannot live in one place all of the time" (p. 96).

All in all, the community building in Herland is characterized by a strong progressive ideology. The group as a whole is of utmost importance, and this can be seen in their methods of child rearing, their recreational activities, their socialist politics, and their lack of regard for material goods.

Les Guerilleres

They say, If I take over the world, let it be to dispossess myself of it immediately, let it be to forge new links between myself and the world." (p. 107)

The community in Les Guerilleres is based on strength and collective courage to restructure the world. They recognize oppression in conventional language, social systems, political systems and
material possession. They recognize these things as merely situational truths and not absolute truths, and they realize that it will take immense strength to strip actions objects phenomena of their meanings and created new.

They say that all they need do is to invent terms that describe themselves without conventional references to herbals or bestiaries. They say that this can be done without pretention. They say that what they must stress above all is their strength and their courage. (p. 53)

In short, the women in Wittig's work are revolutionaries.

It is made obvious in the following passage that the women are acutely aware of the pliability of truth.

The game consists of posing a series of questions, for example, Who says, I wish it, I order it, my will must take the place of reason? Or, Who must never act according to their will? Or else, or else, Who is only an animal the colour of flowers? There are plenty of others such as, Who must observe the three obediences and whose destiny is written in their anatomy? The answer to all the questions is the same. Then they begin to laugh ferociously slapping each other on the shoulders. Some of the women, lips pared, spit blood. (p. 86)

Also, because the women laugh at such ideas, this shows the possibility of a world without these truths, a world where people do not even know what this means.

The women in Wittig's work also show contempt for the love of personal property and for the acquisition of material things. "What belongs to you on this earth? Only death. And--if happiness consists in the possession of something, then hold fast to this sovereign happiness--to die" (p. 116).

(NOTE: here she also deconstructs the life/death dichotomy and shows how death is an inevitable facet of life, a part of life, a
step in the cycle of life. At the same time she critiques the acquisition of the material as a feasible goal, she also blows away the typical Western fear of death by showing how the dichotomy between life and death has no foundation.

Along with the individual strength and courage necessary to change these thought forms (language, possession, hierarchy, oppression) the women also realize that collectivity is necessary. "Beware of dispersal. Remain united like the characters in a book. Do not abandon the collectivity. The women are seated on the piles of leaves holding hands watching the clouds that pass outside" (p. 58).
CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

Mannheim was the first to point out that Utopia is only a fantasy from the dominant perspective, and if we look deeply enough into the critiques and alternatives presented by Utopian authors, we can see that many utopian ideas are, indeed, workable systems. The capacity for utopia exists everywhere, from Atlanta to Zimbabwe.

It is difficult to believe that utopian blueprints are impossible to implement. Piercy, for example, comes close to handing the reader a constitution with her book, and Gillman isn’t far off. All three of the novels in this study present systems with the potential to exist in actual time.

Each author has her own way of imploring the reader to act. They all draw intricate blueprints for alternative systems, and for rethinking the obvious, each in their own way. Piercy describes the social systems of Mattapoisett as having drawn upon the systems of other societies.

As Mattapoisett is in Massachusetts, a projection of our future, we assume that their history is our history. Although she does not cite specific cultures that the people drew upon to create their political-economy, the reader can conjecture. One such society might be the !Kung San of Africa.

Other societies could also be pointed to. Many Native American tribes were egalitarian-based, and some African tribes as well.
Indigenous peoples from Australia to New Zealand to the Americas lived with greater social sensitivity and sensitivity to the ecosystem as a whole.

This is certainly not to say, however, that all utopian visions are comparable. In fact, they often present as drastic a contrast to each other as they do to existing social systems. For instance, all three of the books in this study present vastly different utopian visions. The most dramatic juxtaposition is, perhaps, the contrast between Wittig's work and Gillman's. Herland is highly structured and progressive ideology is central (that is, constant re-evaluation of the current situation and consistent attempts to improve it\(^2\)). The women there use genetic engineering to "breed out the lowest types" (Gillman, 1915, p. 82), as well as to make their cats more gentle and to make sure all the plants that are going to take up room in their country are useful and produce food. They use peaceful methods of restraining criminals, and motherhood in their land is synonymous with sacred. Les Guerilleres, on the other hand, are entirely unstructured. There is no hierarchy, there is no law, life in the women's country is almost entirely based upon the ecstatic experience. The women greet death without much upset, and motherhood is not paid much attention. They are constantly destroying their productions so there is not any progress. This is done deliberately. In fact, Wittig negates the dialectic itself as a hinderance. According to Whittig (1969),

the phrase the women have transformed hate into energy
and energy into hate contains an antithesis and therefore lacks precision. The women get angry saying that an antithesis is indeed involved and why has it not been suppressed, retaining the first part which alone has nay meaning. (p. 76)

This implies that immediate action, spontaneous action (constant festival, the ecstatic experience) is the only thing carrying meaning. This, in conjunction with her theory that everything must be remade starting from basic principles, drives home Wittig’s point that one does not construct utopia, one deconstructs to find it. In other words, the goal is to strip away the societal mind, and in the primal state that we are left with, all spontaneous action is utopia.

Gillman’s critique of Western society is that not enough careful planning goes into taking care of a whole society and its citizens; her vision is that when systems are attended to, people will be taken care of. Wittig’s critique is that too much planning goes into systems and into manufacturing thought; her vision is that if there are no systems or systemic thought, there will be autonomy and reclaiming of power.

Piercy’s critique and vision falls somewhere in between the sophisticated organization of Gillman’s world and the utter chaos of Wittig’s. Her work seems to agree with Wittig’s in that everything must be remade starting with basic principles. Also, rather than remaining locked into a post-modern doctrine that dictates all systems are constructions and, therefore, one construction is as good as another, both Piercy and Wittig invent new systems. This implies a value judgement on social constructions, i.e., this system is
preferable to that one, and they state their cases as to how. However, unlike Wittig, Piercy suggests that careful attention to the social organization is important in order to maintain a cooperative system with equal access to available resources. I am aware, here, that I have suggested a dialectic, though that was not my intention. I do not view Piercy’s work as a synthesis of Gillman’s and Wittig’s, but all three as productions of vastly different ideologies, each with merit.

Mattapoisett and Wittig’s country are both exemplary Anarchistic (while Herland is obviously socialist), but Piercy and Wittig’s views on social organization differ widely. Piercy sets up a functioning anarcho-syndicalism, with a decentralized government in which coordinators are chosen for short terms by lot. This emphasizes the importance of organization, even in a non-hierarchical functioning anarchy. Wittig, on the other hand, highlights the need for chaos in deconstructing the detrimental systems we have been infused with. Her non-organized anarchy suggests complete autonomy (self-government). No one else will hold an individual accountable for her actions, but the results of these actions are all her own to cope with.

Another stark contrast appearing in my analysis is between how sex is viewed in Mattapoisett and in Herland. In Mattapoisett the sensual is revered. It is seen as a natural and wonderful part of existence between biological males, biological females, or both. Monogamy isn’t the norm, so jealousy and possessiveness don’t play a role in a person’s liaisons. People in Mattapoisett are free with
their bodies and open about sex, while not being the least bit exploitative. The flipside of this coin is Gillman's Herland. In a society of Parthenogenic women, sex seems like more of an aberration than anything else. No sex drive is apparent in the women. They rarely think about it other than as a strange curiosity, or to humor their male companions. Gillman implies that sex itself is necessarily exploitative, although, part of her harsh view of sexual relationships is probably due to the social mores of her time. Piercy's contrasting implication is that aggression in sexual relationships is a social malady which can be corrected by rethinking sex.

Gillman's maternal pantheism and Wittig's earthy warrior religion present another marked difference between utopian visions. Gillman's woman centered religion focuses on the mother aspect of woman--life and birth and nurturing (perhaps due to the fact that Gillman herself was a single mother, an unpopular status at that time), while Wittig's focus is woman in her warrior aspect--chaos, death and destruction. Also, the way the women in the two different societies express their religion is different. Herlanders aspire to "peace and beauty, and comfort and love with god" (Gillman, 1915, p. 117) while Wittig's women abase themselves on the ground three times screaming "May this order be destroyed" (Wittig, 1969, p. 27). Piercy's work is nearer Gillman's on this count, pantheism at any rate, if not maternal, with a reverence for life and the ecosystem as a whole.
Aside from the fact that all three books are written from varying feminist perspectives, there is very little that all three books have in common. However, there are a few common themes. One, of course, is the lack of hierarchy. This includes not only an absence of gender hierarchy, but an absence of class hierarchy as well. All three books present means of governing in which everyone has a voice (or simply governs herself, in Wittig's case), and meritocracy is omitted from all the books. One has what one needs readily available, and people are considered worthy to be alive simply because they exist. None of the authors put much stress on material possessions beyond necessity. Gillman's women don't understand the concept, Wittig's women express blatant contempt for the idea, and Piercy's characters enjoy little treats occasionally, but don't put them particularly high on their priority list. Another surprising commonality is that the diet of all three societies is primarily vegetarian. Gillman's and Wittig's societies are both exclusively vegetarian, and people in Piercy's Mattapoissett only eat meat on special occasions. This implies respect for non-human forms of life and reflects a concern for non-hierarchical living.

Beyond the details of the books themselves, the mere selection of utopia as a genre has implications. Firstly, it implies rethinking paradigms and a willingness (even eagerness) to rewrite common knowledge. In short, it urges us to think about things differently. Secondly, it implies that the alteration of existing social systems is necessary. Utopia is not the portrait of an impossible fantasy
world, but a prescription for social change with its roots in reality. No matter how vastly utopian visions differ, they all boil down to artistic social criticism and innovative ideas for a better way to live.

From Gillman's Socialist Herland to Piercy's Anarchosyndicalism to Wittig's autonomy, the way each system functions is mapped out for the reader to the extent that the countries presented are perfectly conceivable. This is particularly true in the case of Mattapoisett, less true in Herland and more obscure in Wittig's country. This is so because Wittig's prime directive, as I see it, is textual revolution, so her work is less systematic in regard to spelling out a working system for the reader. However, she (Whittig, 1969) is no less imploring when she urges the reader to reclaim her own power.

The women say shame on you. They say, you are domesticated, forcibly fed, like geese in the yard of the farmer who fattens them. They say, there is no more distressing spectacle than that of slaves who take pleasure in their servile state. (p. 135)

This is clearly directed to the reader. It is a goad or a prod to a change of behavior. She expresses disgust with the way of life that the dominant paradigm encourages, lays out a better way to live, and then urges us to change.

There was a time when you were not a slave, remember that. You walked alone, full of laughter, you bathed bare-bottomed. You say there are no words to describe this time, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or failing that, invent. (p. 89)

These passages are clearly not fictive fantasy on Wittig's
part. In fact, if she wrote her intention any more explicitly, these passages would simply read, "Free yourself! You are being oppressed!"

This is further illustrated when we see the women abasing themselves on the ground screaming "May this order be destroyed." It is quite clear that the author intends (or, at least hopes) that action will come of this book.

This purport is equally clear in the other two novels. For instance, Gillman (1915) thumbs her nose at Western society when she writes about how the women solved an impending population problem.

[they did not solve it by] a 'struggle for existence' which would result in an everlasting writhing mass of underbred people trying to get ahead of one another--some few on top, temporarily, many constantly crushed out underneath, a hopeless substratum of paupers and degenerates. (p. 68)

Instead, they sat down in council, being that they were very clear, strong thinkers, and decided to limit the population to the number that they could reasonably support, while at the same time keeping rigorous standards of peace, comfort, health, beauty and progress. Gillman makes praxis seem not only desirable, but quite easy and straightforward in this passage. In fact, she makes it seem like more of an effort to keep a bad system than to systematically institute an order that works for everyone by simply sitting down in council and thinking clearly. Being as no one likes to think of her/himself as an unreasonable personal or an unclear thinker, Gillman pretty much is saying, "Well then, prove it. Fix the social systems. It isn't that hard, and things really are a mess" (p. 113).

She drives the point home one more time when Vandyk concedes
that the women of Herland are "far nearer right than we are"
(p. 113).

Piercy talks about praxis extensively in her work. This is not
surprising considering that Woman On the Edge Of Time is the most
elaborate guide for social change of the three novels in this study.
Piercy is so detailed that a group of people attempting to begin a
political-economy from ground zero could take her book and call it
policy. It is as detailed as most systems already in existence. If
the intricacy of Piercy's (1976) political economy isn't enough to
make the implication of praxis clear, then there are a few passages
within the work that do. For instance, when Connie discusses revolu-
tion with a group of her friends from the future,

'oh, revolution! Honchos marching around in imitation
uniforms, noise in the streets and nothing changes.'
'No, Connie! It's the people who worked out the labor
intensive farming we do. It's all the people who changed
how people bought food, raised children, went to school!
Who made new unions, withheld rent, refused to go to wars.'
(p. 198)

Piercy's tone becomes wistful after that, as the people of
Mattapoisett inform Connie, "But there was a thirty-year war that
culminated in a revolution that set up what we have. Or else there
wasn't and we don't exist" (p. 198).

In other words, it's up to us to change how people buy food,
raise children, go to school. It's up to us to refuse the draft, re-
fuse to pay taxes, refuse to be exploited. If not, Mattapoisett will
not exist, and the dominant paradigm is correct in it's assumption
that utopia is a fiction.
Piercy makes it clear just how vehement she is in her aim at the end of the book, when Connie commits her heroic act, her crime against the state. Connie has just killed six people. She killed them by slipping a poison she sneaked from her brother Luis' greenhouse into the doctor's coffee. This is a self-preservation tactic. They are experimenting on mental patients. She is afraid for her life.

I just killed six people because they are the violence prone. Theirs is the money and the power, theirs the poisons that slow the mind and dull the heart. Theirs are the powers of life and death. I killed them. Because it is war. (p. 375)

Piercy, like Wittig, is informing the reader that it is indeed a war. A war between master and slave. A war for our bodies. A war for our minds. A war for our autonomy, our happiness, our freedom. War isn't easy. It isn't fun, but if we do not reclaim our knowledge of a time when we were not slaves, if we don't think clearly about our alternatives, if we are not willing to provide serious opposition to the state and the state mind, then utopia cannot and will not exist.

According to Pfohl (1993), much of the control the state exerts upon us is through ideology, through controlling our thought processes so much so that when you read of stabbings rape gang violence child beatings drug abuse shootings premodeled images come to mind, stereotypical images of persons whom white politicians say ought to be put away. With virtually no memories of how these thoughts have come to occupy your minds. (p. 135)

Step one, therefore, is rethinking paradigms. This lies in
the realm of Deconstruction, and feminist utopias attempt to reorganize our mental systems. Step two, however, is praxis. If oppressive social systems are justified, reinforced and perpetuated through ideology and mindcrime, then it follows that if one exorcises the state mind, then one is apt to influence the physical environment by behaving in ways which evidence her new paradigmatic structure. The Civil Rights movement, the Anti-Vietnam War movement, the Feminist movement, and other facets of the counter culture have evidenced success in lifestyle change. In Europe (and also here in the U.S.), entire groups of people travel round without roots in society. Although a changed ideology does not necessarily bring about a change in behavior, it is unlikely that this behavior modification would occur outside of a counter-cultural ideology.

There are many groups of freaks and marginals who have lived utopia in the loopholes of our culture. Utopia is not inherently fictive. It is only fictive if one buys into the axiom, out of sight, out of mind. Utopia can exist, has existed and currently exists.

In order to birth a different social order, we must first have its conception. As any mother will tell you, birth is a much more difficult process. It is not, however, impossible.
ENDNOTES

1 I am aware that Mannheim was referring to actual social movements, rather than to literary utopias, but I believe that his theories can be applied equally well to utopian novels.

2 The absence of rape in societies which accord women and men equal status works well with actual research done by Peggy Sanday, an anthropologist who did a cross-cultural study on the incidence of rape. She divided the societies in her sample into two categories, rape free societies (societies with a low or non-existent incidence of rape) and rape prone societies (societies with a high incidence of rape). She found that rape prone societies had male gods, accord women low status, and encourage aggressiveness in boys, while the reverse was true of rape free societies.

3 In a social context, the Marxist dialectic works as follows: the current situation serves as a thesis and its opposite as an antithesis. They resolve themselves in a synthesis which then becomes the thesis and the cycle begins again. This is the social theory of constant progress.

4 The lack of racial hierarchy is present in Piercy's book through their synthetic birthing process, and in Wittig's book through her presentation of the goddess as a black women, but racism is unfortunately present in Gillman's novel--she stresses that the Herlanders are Aryans and refers to the aboriginal peoples down the mountain as savages. This is very likely symptomatic of the
social climate of the time.


