

To: The Scholar and Feminist X Planning Committee
From: Lee Coppernoll, Women's Center
Subject: Minutes of Second Planning Committee Meeting, September 30, 1982

Bettina announced that several people have conflicts with the April 16 date set for the conference; in order to make a final decision about the date so that we can reserve space at the College, all committee members must inform Bettina or the Women's Center staff no later than October 13 whether April 16 or 23 is problematic. We will let you know the outcome at the 10/14 meeting. Bettina distributed a reading list and suggested that the articles on technology and women's paid labor be read for the next meeting, and the articles on technology and women's unpaid labor and reproductive rights be read for the October 28 meeting.

Bettina opened the discussion with Braverman's point that the problem with technology in a capitalistic society is the manner in which it is employed; that technology itself is not inherently bad. In response it was pointed out that technology has not actually improved the conditions of women's lives. (Perhaps if women were more involved in the development and technology it could bring more benefits to women?)

The issue of time in relation to technology was discussed from both a positive and negative view. Developments in technology can cut down work time and increase "leisure" time. Reproductive technology is marketed as a means of giving women control over time by allowing women to decide when to become pregnant and when to give birth. At the same time the desire to control time can become problematic. Whose time is being saved? Whose time is being controlled? For what purposes is time being saved? It is important to look at how people spend their "leisure" time. How will the control and saving of time change our understanding of time and how does this impact on class and gender?

It was asked how technology is being defined in the context of the conference - in a philosophical or mechanical way, as development or product? The general response was that both aspects need to be taken into account. For example, we need to look at both the meaning of the home and how the home is changed by technology - how the idea of the home as a computer workplace calls up images of pre-industrial family life; yet the electronic cottage may become a highly privatized home sphere with women once again doing piecework.

The impact of artificial intelligence was examined as an issue of power and control over knowledge. One principle in the development of artificial intelligence, as presented by Marvin Minsky in the New Yorker interview, is the reduction of information, to get to the least information needed to know something, which requires the ability to abstract from context, focusing only on necessary and sufficient information. If the end of artificial intelligence is to "whittle away knowledge" to minimal logical points, doesn't this present a threat to other ways of thinking and living - isn't this a form of intellectual and cultural imperialism?

The discussion frequently returned to the specific relation of women to technology. Will it make any difference whether women take part in the development of technology? Why are women afraid of technology? Are women more people-oriented? Several people asserted that there is no such thing as male and female logic and that if women are trained to be knowledgeable about and comfortable with computer technology they will be active agents in the development and use of technology. They emphasized that expertise in technology broadens women's employment opportunities as evidenced in the library fields where changes have been particularly significant.

Someone asked whether or not women should be involved in designing and producing technology. Reasons for a critical posture towards technology were presented and many of these related to issues of power and control. It was observed that technology, especially computer technology, is often used as a tool of power - as power over information and power over women's lives. For example, in home technology women's ability for action is diminished. People felt the need to differentiate between freedom and control when discussing women as users of technology; in particular a woman's decision to buy an elaborate home appliance is different from being forced to use electronic technology to do piecework at home. The former (the "Cuisinart" example) is a luxury available to certain classes of women, while the latter limits freedom and may not provide sufficient income. Some people questioned why, if the quality of life has in general been improved through advances in technology, the lives of women and working people haven't improved?

It was reiterated that we must develop a broader perspective on the impact of technology on women's lives; to address the questions of technology and perception, that is to say, the impact of technology on our understanding of our daily lives, how we look at and respond to the world, how we see the nature of objects, how we understand relationship.

Other issues raised included: the difference between mechanization of the assembly line and computerized factories where workers do very different types of work; the popularity of computer games; the portrayal in feminist science fiction of the relation between women and technology.

The next Scholar and Feminist planning committee meeting will be on Thursday, October 14 at 4:15 pm. The following readings will be discussed and copies are available in the Women's Center for borrowing.

J. Scott, "The Mechanization of Women's Work" and V. Guliano, "The Mechanization of Office Work" Scientific American, Sept. 1982.

C. Cockburn, "The Material of Male Power," Feminist Review #9, October 1981.

Linda Lim, "Women's Work in Multinational Electronics Factories," in R. Dauber and M. Cain, eds., Women and Technological Change in Developing Countries, AAAS Symposium 53, 1981.

Bettina announced that the annual SHOT meeting, to be held on October 28-31 in Philadelphia, will have sessions on women and technology. She plans to attend and would like to know if other members of the planning committee are interested in going to the meeting.

Present: Bettina Berch, Leslie Calman, Sally Chapman, Lee Coppernoll, Elizabeth Corbett, Sally Cummins, Eva Eilenberg, Wendy Fairey, Jane Gould, Diane Harriford, Jaime Horwitz, Janie Kritzman, Maria La Sala, Julie Marsteller, Nancy Miller, Georgia Pestana, Quandra Stadler, Mary Ellen Tucker.