

Patricia J. Thompson
(Yelena V. Mayakovsky)

THE
ACCIDENTAL THEORIST

The Double Helix of Everyday Life

BOOK 1

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THE HESTIA TRILOGY



PETER LANG

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INTRODUCTION

The world is not presented to us in self-evident order. Influenced by culture, we impose order on what we see. From birth, we have changed our paradigms, or worldviews, at critical turning points in our struggle to separate appearance from reality and fact from fiction. Once we discredit the assumptions on which a paradigm is based, we de-stabilize a host of related concepts. A new paradigm dislodges its predecessors. Once consensus is reached, those who accept a new paradigm form a new epistemic community who, for the most part, share the same view of the world. No such broad consensus exists among women, either those who count themselves "feminist" or those who abjure the feminist label.

In general, feminist women are those who were educated (either formally or informally) to challenge the gender status quo. Their reasons may stem from instances of domestic violence, experiences of discrimination in the workplace, or the humiliation of being treated as people lacking a full range of human competencies. To remedy such inequities, they voiced their opposition to established roles and norms. For some women, this is unsettling, even threatening, to their sense of who and what they are and what their place in the scheme of things may be. This book, the first volume in a "Hestia trilogy," suggests there is something in the scheme of things that further exacerbates women's disadvantaged status and traces it to the ancient *oikos/polis* split in ancient Greece.

Plan of the Book

Part I of this volume, "Hestian Feminism: The Feminism of Hearth and Home," offers the Hestian/Hermean Dual Systems Paradigm to compensate for a "blind spot" in feminist thinking. It claims the domestic domain (or *oikos*-system) as a legitimate site from which to develop feminist theory. The proposed model expands the gendered "two spheres" to a genderless "dual systems" model. The dual systems are identified as "hestian" (named for Hestia, ancient Greek guardian of the hearth, hearthfire and, by extension, the "homeplace") and "hermean" (named for Hermes, ancient Greek guardian of bridges and commerce and, by extension, the "marketplace"). It further suggests that the relationship between the two systems be conceptualized as the "double helix of everyday life."

The *Prologue*, "A Day in the Life of a Hestian Feminist" is a reflection

from a "kitchen table" perspective on the mundane events that prompted this inquiry. Other women thinkers, among them Catherine Bateson and Laura Duhan Kaplan, raise questions about the way women bring ethical, esthetic, and epistemological principles to bear on the hestian events of everyday life.

Chapter 1, "The Accidental Theorist," accepts Aristotle's view that a human being operates in three capacities: as *zoon oikonomikon* (a household being), *zoon politikon* (a political being) and *zoon koinonikon* (a being meant "by nature" to live a communal, or social life). Feminism has challenged women's exclusion from the political domain. It has not challenged the exclusion of the household domain from masculinist or feminist theory. Can a woman who considers herself feminist support women's engagement in the traditional fields or the so-called "helping professions"? Perhaps we should ask, instead, why the domestic aspect of "being" has been left to women and neglected by men.

Chapter 2, "Seeking the Truth in Everyday Life," explains how one's personal perspective frames the diverse data collected on a single day. Fitting the pieces together requires one's "internal gyroscope" to determine the significance of any event or observation within the context of one's life. To some extent, we are all theorists or philosophers. In theory-making, the theorist must "connect the dots" in ways that make sense of the world in which she/he lives. Many ideas in the present work were inspired by sociologist Dorothy E. Smith's *The Everyday World as Problematic*. Smith observed that her disciplinary affiliation defined and interpreted the world of home and family, *but there was no talking back* (8). This chapter "talks back" to explain what made me an "accidental theorist" of everyday life.

Chapter 3, "Hearth and Home: Myth and Metaphor in Everyday Life," explores the widespread evidence of a "language of the hearth" in varied cultures. Such usages suggest a commonality in human cultural experience as studied by anthropologists and archeologists.

Chapter 4, "Re-Claiming Hestia: Guardian of the Homeplace," reviews scholarship related to the hearth, or *hestia*, and the goddess also called Hestia. It reveals the deeper meaning of this divinity's neglected attributes, most important of which is her centrality in the everyday life of the ancient Greeks.

Chapter 5, "Re-Claiming Hermes: Guardian of the Marketplace," examines the complex persona embodied in the mythogem of the god of communication, commerce, and bridges. Hermes provides a dramatic contrast

to Hestia. Reclamation of the dual mythemes provides a “contrast set” with which to re-think the private/public perspectives in everyday life.

Chapter 6, “The Private/Public Spheres Revisited” retraces the *oikos/polis* split in 5th century BCE Greece. It claims that the split accounts for more than women’s exclusion from the political realm. The split also resulted in privileging the political at the expense of the familial, introducing a *polis*-centric as well as an androcentric bias to theory.

Chapter 7, “From Separate Spheres to Interactive Systems: The Double Helix of Everyday Life,” discusses the potential of general systems theory (GST) for the study of everyday life. A systems approach provides a paralogical alternative to linear thinking. The chapter suggests the hestian/hermean systems be viewed as “dissipative structures” that, despite changes in form, name, and label, maintain their identity across time and culture.

Part II of this volume, “Seeing Through New Lenses: The Hestian Feminist Standpoint,” describes how seeing through the dual lenses of the Hestian/Hermean Dual Systems Paradigm allows theorists to re-view some taken-for-granted aspects of feminist theory.

Chapter 8, “The Hestian Feminist Standpoint,” offers the hestian standpoint as an alternative—yet consistent and coherent—perspective from which to re-think dualisms and dichotomies. It calls for a radical re-thinking of standpoint theories based on gender categories. Rather than thinking of dual entities existing in opposition, they can be seen in juxtaposition, where each category helps to define the Other.

Chapter 9, “Hestianeutics: Deconstructing Hermean Language,” reveals how adopting the guiding metaphors of the dual systems paradigm provides a fresh approach to language and to textual interpretation. It suggests that a “hestianeutic” reading can supplement patriarchally grounded “hermeneutic” readings. It offers examples of how hestian meanings can be teased out of hermean language through “reading against the grain” and engaging in the process of deconstruction. It suggests that the hestian discourse of domesticity (the language of the hearth) contrasts with the hermean discourse of domination (the language of the market).

Chapter 10, “Revisiting Fustel’s Ancient City,” examines a foundational text in political theory and subjects it to a hestianeutic reading to disclose the author/ translator’s hermean biases. In this case, a hestianeutic interpretation of a canonical text reveals the hestian palimpsest in the original work.

Chapter 11, "Hestian Thinking in Antiquity and Modernity: Pythagorean Women Philosophers and 19th Century Domestic Scientists," applies the lenses provided by the Hestian/ Hermean Dual Systems Paradigm to compare women's philosophies in two widely separated historical periods. This exercise reveals that hestian women philosophers "do" philosophy differently from men.

Chapter 12, "Feminist Discourse and Hestian Discourse: Deconstructing Three Texts," applies a hestianeutic reading to the writing of three major feminist writers: Rosi Braidotti, Theresa deLauretis, and bell hooks.

The *Epilogue*, "Hestian Feminism: A 'New Humanism for the New Millennium'" makes a case for going "beyond gender" in feminist theory. It distinguishes the hestian/hermean as the double helix of everyday life. It lays out ten principles that provide for a Hestian feminist discourse that would include the *oikos*-centric perspective of the Household/ Family and contrast it with the patriarchal paradigm of the Government/State. As shown by the examples in this volume, a paradigm shift may open a pathway to a "new humanism" for the new millennium that will allow women and men to join together in an enlightened approach to their common life.

PROLOGUE

A Day in the Life of a Hestian Feminist

The process of improvisation that goes into composing a life is compounded in the process of remembering a life; like a patchwork quilt in a watercolor painting, ruffled and evocative. Yet it is this second process, composing a life through memory as well as day-to-day choices, that seems to me most essential to creative living. The past empowers the present, and the groping footsteps leading to this present mark the pathways to the future.

—Catherine Bateson

On a Saturday morning in 1999 when I set out to revise the first draft of this book, I began a process that made me think how much a woman's life is, indeed, a kind of patchwork, made up of bits and pieces from the past, stitched together to be useful in the present. I felt, as many writers do, a tension created by the comments of two anonymous scholars who had generously, and rather thoroughly, critiqued my manuscript from two entirely different perspectives. My job was to reconcile their concerns within the framework of a book intended to lay out a theory of Hestian Feminism, a feminism of everyday life.

In this project of conceptualizing a feminism of "hearth and home," I propose that Hestia, ancient Greek goddess of the hearthfire and the household, represents a demand for parity in feminist theory for the invisible, private world of the Household/Family with the visible, public world of the Government/State represented by Hermes, among other things, the god of commerce and communication. These two mythic personae represent the essential tension between private/public life—between the homeplace and the marketplace. These are the guiding concepts of my work as a whole, as I hope will become evident as this text unfolds.

I realized that I would be completing this book—begun over a decade ago—in the early years of the 21st century. What could I say to feminists in the new millennium? What could I say to women who do not consider them-

*and between external & internal dialog
in material and the love economy
now we do it & what we do it for*

selves feminist? Men are part of our common life. Could what I write make sense to them? After all, I am the mother of a son and “grandma” to a young grandson. My hope is that what I write can lead women and men to a shared perspective—or at least to understand why a common perspective is complicated by sex and gender biases and power imbalances. . . . and roles

Annette C. Baier (1991) illustrates, by her own example, that in order for a woman to judge a feminist theorist, it is not inappropriate to draw upon her own experience. Baier does this by contesting some of the theories of Nancy Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) and comparing them with her own experience of mothering and of her “traditional” mother’s influence on the life course of her “nontraditional” sisters (238–90). In “Speaking for Herself,” Virginia Held (1993) provides a thumbnail biographical note that frames her work within the boundaries of her personal experience. What follows is written in the same spirit.

A New Beginning: Feminist Theory for a New Millennium

That Saturday I had planned a full day—a day that would begin with writing and end with a spaghetti supper for close friends. To free myself for thinking and writing, I decided to get some preparations for the evening meal out of the way. I took the Zinfandel out of the wine cabinet and the frozen pesto sauce out of the freezer. I took out the pignoli nuts and the cheese grater. I took out the garlic, garlic press, and butter and sliced the fresh Italian loaf I had just bought. The garlic bread was wrapped carefully in foil and refrigerated to be heated later. The salad makings were covered with clear wrap to be combined later with a vinaigrette dressing. I was eager to get to my office where books, papers, and computer disks beckoned. The questions raised by two readers and an editor challenged me to re-think what I had done. I was raring to go! As my hands set things out on my kitchen counter, my mind buzzed with thousands of bits of information that, like a quilt, needed to be pieced together.

Then it happened. I knocked a tightly packed and covered plastic container of uncooked pasta to the floor. Before I could take out enough for a dinner for four, there they were! All over my newly swept and mopped floor. What a sight! One vast game of pick-up-sticks. Einstein’s comment that God doesn’t play dice with the universe popped into my mind. Perhaps, I thought, the household gods—the Lares and Penates of ancient Rome—were more mischievous. Could they be trying to keep a woman in her place—

the kitchen—and out of the theory wars that engage many feminist thinkers today? Where was Hestia, goddess of household order, when I needed her! Should I stop everything and head to the corner store for one box of pasta? That would waste precious time while my mind was fresh. I'm a morning person—a very early morning person. Because my floor had just been swept and mopped clean, I decided to pick up, rather than sweep out, the pasta. I looked at the spaghetti sticks fanning out like the rays of a cosmic burst of energy. If I looked closely, there were patterns, and patterns within patterns. I could not see them all, of course. Some lay criss-cross. Some had fallen almost parallel to each other. There were sticks in the center. There were outliers. There were pieces broken into smaller pieces. And then, because they were round, fragments had rolled out of sight at the edge of the refrigerator and the stove. What was the message for me? That mess was no random event. The energy that knocked the container to the floor and released those tightly packed sticks of semolina met its limit at the floor that (if one believed in the physical laws of the universe) could only have led to this unique, if frustrating, outcome. How much more energy—counter entropic energy—would be needed to pick them up?

Now I had two jobs: to set my kitchen straight and to straighten out my thoughts. The words of a one-time president of Barnard College, Millicent Carey McIntosh, came to mind. She advised women college graduates of my generation that even if we found ourselves caring for children (washing diapers, I think she said), we didn't have to *think* about washing diapers. Luckily, by the time I had my son, we had washing machines and disposable diapers. That left a lot more time for thinking. It seems that, despite "women's liberation," and no matter how elevated a woman's ambitions or achievements might be, some work is "never done." It is never done because it is enmeshed with the life process, a continuously unfolding phenomenon. My conviction that such work need not and should not be exclusively "women's work" is one theme of this book. However, having no one to whom I could delegate the task, I had to pick up the spaghetti myself.

I bent to retrieve the makings for my dinner party, grateful for a cursory familiarity with chaos theory. I found the notion of order in the midst of disorder relevant in my circumstances! If I could not control objective events, I could control my subjective reactions to them. I had just taught a graduate course in which I had assigned a book by Margaret Wheatley called *Leadership and the New Science* (1992). In it she explains some key ideas about chaos, order, control, and autonomy. These came to mind as I dealt

with this mini-crisis. I recalled that systems theory requires that I look for relationships and connections among seemingly random events. I had to get myself back into what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls the “flow” of experience. I needed to put what had just occurred into the context of the dual worlds of my daily activities—the private world of self, household, family, and home and the public world of teacher, writer, activist, hostess, and theorist. I was responsible for two kinds of work: the labor of my private life and the labor of my public life. After carefully—very carefully—picking up the pasta and assuring myself it was clean and usable, I needed a rest!

Keeping an Open Mind

On my kitchen table lay a week’s worth of news magazines, professional journals, and the “Weekend Edition” of the *New York Times* (January 29, 1999). I had not planned to read them then. But one way to commemorate birthdays is to give celebrants a copy of the newspaper published on the momentous day when they were born. Before me lay the record of the day I would begin my “labor” so my manuscript could have a “birth,” midwived, as it were, by its unknown reviewers. If I read the paper, I could get a jump start on the *Zeitgeist*—the social context—of my book’s coming into being. When finished, it would seek its place in a real world that was changing even as I sat there. What could I write that would fit into a world represented by “All the news that’s fit to print?” Can anyone grasp the complexity of the modern world? It may not be more complex than it ever was, but its complexity is “brought home” ever more dramatically. Expanded by a communications system of cable and network TV and the Internet, distant events reach the kitchen table as they never have before. The kitchen is no longer as isolated as it was when I was a young wife and a new mother. Perhaps what women need is a kitchen table feminism, a feminism that addresses everyday events in the lives of ordinary women and men. “Keep an open mind,” I reminded myself. Check the papers!

I sat down, mindful that women in other parts of the world were coping with disorders of a magnitude I have never faced and can barely imagine—a disastrous earthquake in Colombia, unspeakable indignities and human rights violations in war-torn regions of Serbia’s Kosovo province. I browsed through one daily newspaper and copies of three current magazines: *The Economist* (January 23–29, 1999), *Natural History* (February 1999), and *Newsweek* (January 25, 1999). A confessed information junkie, I turned

on cable TV. Why limit myself to a single news source or a single medium? A flood of images, information, and ideas descended. What to admit? What to exclude? How to sort them out? How to file these facts? How to bring them into focus? What "ordering device" could I apply?

A Personal Perspective

Each of us, I believe, begins with a personal perspective shaped by gender socialization, our family of origin and peer group culture, our education, and our unique life experiences, including intimate relationships and parenthood. My mother raised me to believe that two things were important for a woman: education and independence. She created a world of intellectual and educational options that made me glad to be a female human being, for me the *sine qua non* of being feminist. One obvious selection criterion for a feminist reader is stories about women. Out went the Sports section. No pictures or stories about women athletes. On page three was a picture of a smiling Madeleine K. Albright, the American Secretary of State. She was walking with Jordan's new Crown Prince Abdullah, whose support she sought for a new American policy advocating a regime change in Iraq based on the ouster of President Saddam Hussein (A3). She had recently sought the support of Egyptian and Saudi Arabian political leaders. After President Clinton signed the Iraq Liberation Bill in November 1998, dissident Iraqi groups would be eligible for support of an unspecified kind in their attempts to overthrow Hussein. My first graduate work was in International Law, but I had taken a different path. I would not be moving among world leaders as was Secretary Albright! However, the paper also reported that the policy she was advocating was questioned (in testimony before the Senate's Armed Services Committee) by Anthony Zinni, the Marine Corps general who commanded American forces in the Persian Gulf (A1,3). Albright also met with NATO allies to discuss the situation in Kosovo. This was an opportunity to think about women and power as well as the road not taken in my own life. <File under "Women in Public Life.">

We never know at what intellectual and personal level any news item is incorporated in our understanding of ourselves and of the world. A picture of women struggling to survive amidst the rubble of a region in central Colombia devastated by an earthquake conveyed the utter misery of the people's situation. The lack of food, water, shelter and other of life's necessities created a climate of fear and insecurity for these victims of a natural

catastrophe that was compounded by their country's inability to provide them with aid (A8). As I stared at the picture of Colombian earthquake survivors, I was reminded that my grandson, Logan, adopted from that country as an infant several years before, had said on seeing the distress of that country "I'm glad I'm here." And so, from the bottom of my heart, was I! Admitting a new person to one's life opens new windows on the world. For a personal reason, another story caught my attention. Because my in-laws had been missionaries in India and my ex-husband was raised there as a "mish kid," I had a visceral reaction when I read the story of the murder of a Christian missionary and his two sons. I was moved by the laments of the lepers whom this dedicated humanitarian had attempted to serve (A9). <File under "Personal Life.">

On the facing page, as a kind of comic relief, appeared the first picture of a smiling Camilla Parker Bowles and her prince, photographed together in public for the first time (A9). Is this news earth-shaking? Is it supposed to be a happy ending? How many other girls still dream of a prince to rescue them from—what? The *Times* also reported the court victory by a 48-year-old TV anchorwoman, Janet Peckinpaugh, who won an \$8 million award in a suit for sex discrimination in employment (B1, 5). The story disclosed that male-female pairings are the accepted rule in TV newscasting. The federal jury of five men and three women supported Ms. Peckinpaugh's claim. Perhaps at the time the jury was deliberating, public consciousness was more focused on sex than on age, a consequence of the ongoing impeachment trial of President Clinton (A1,14). Having myself been part of a ten-year class action sex discrimination suit against my employer, The City University of New York, I was glad to see that sex bias in employment was receiving continued attention and that it had not taken a decade for Ms. Peckinpaugh to get her day in court. Visible and articulate women are still better able to make their case than women in less prestigious occupations. And it doesn't hurt to be attractive, either! <File under "Women and the Media.">

I teach courses in both women's studies and education. Another story caught my eye. Ruth Swinney, an immigrant from Colombia, is a successful school principal who simply walked away from a two-year stint during which she had cleaned up a century-old school building, raised students' reading scores, and provided them with such "frills" as music and art programs. As a graduate of a specialized high school for the arts, I cannot imagine an education without them. After this exhausting (and apparently unappreci-

ated) effort, Swinney wanted more time for herself so she could serve as a mentor for graduate education students (B1). Not surprisingly, another story reported that only one in five public school teachers felt well qualified to teach in a modern classroom (A12). Commenting on this report, Arthur Levine, President of Columbia Teachers College, observed that, "in the past the field of education took advantage of bright women and members of minorities whose only career opportunities were teaching and nursing" but that these women could now get higher-paying jobs in business (A12)." Is such work as nursing and teaching of so little value to society that no one competent to do it will want to?

In an education initiative, a beleaguered President Clinton proposed to narrow the "skills gap" by spending nearly \$1 billion more on such things as job training, adult education, and programs to cut dropout rates and prepare poor children for college (A12), a move he hoped would enlist the cooperation of the business community. In response to the President's emphasis on adult literacy, Representative Bill Gooding, Republican of Pennsylvania, observed that the President's proposals were too narrowly focused and should take into account an entire family's literacy needs (A12). How will these educational and family needs be addressed in the next century? <File both under "Women and Education.">

On the front page, Federal Reserve Chair Alan Greenspan warned Congress not to count on projected Government budget surpluses to rescue Social Security. Since retirement is not too far away in my own life, I'll follow this story with great interest. Other economic issues reported that day spanned the crisis in emerging markets addressed at the World Economic Forum (C1). In an OpEd piece, farmer Jean Anne Casey expressed concern about the price of pork and the pressures placed on family farmers by the tactics of agricultural conglomerates (A19). Since one of my closest women friends, Tillie Barry, is a farmer in Pennsylvania, I "resonated" with Casey's views. How many feminists, I wondered, actually have farm families as friends? <File both under "Economics.">

To get another perspective on our taken-for-granted American century, I next flipped through the British magazine *The Economist* (January 23-29). Its cover picture featured rapturous young women. The lead story "Foolish Love" expressed surprise at the support many American women continued to give their priapic president. In the magazine, however, I found only one image of a woman in public life: America's top trade representative, Charlene Barshefsky. On a trip to Tokyo, she was called "Dragon Lady" by

the Japanese. She is described as a brilliant lawyer, known for her tenacity and toughness—qualities grudgingly admired in a woman. Her attitude, as *The Economist* reports, derives from her worldview. She has said, “We (Americans) expect foreign countries to provide the same level of access to us that we have provided to the world.... You get what you give. It’s that simple. No free rides.” In effect, international trade is a zero-sum game. As reported by *The Economist*, her policy “is based on a narrow, legalistic view of the world. It is about screwing concessions from other countries, rather than about the mutual benefits of free trade. It is about enforcing the letter of the 260-odd new agreements, at the expense of the big picture” (61). One of her liabilities, according to an old friend, is her loyalty to the president, a general characteristic of team players of both sexes in bureaucratic organizations. The “big picture” seems necessary to account for the way economic conditions in one part of the world influence economic conditions in other parts of the world. Since both Albright and Barshevsky have attained positions of power in international circles, one has to ask whether the women who attain such positions ever act in the interests of other women. While all these bits and pieces come together from my personal perspective, I am not sure other feminists would necessarily see things the way I do. <File with “Women in Public Life.”>

As I looked through *Natural History* (February 1999), I was struck by photographer Rachel Cobb’s picture of a tall, exquisitely muscular Tanzanian mother, her sleeping infant slung on her back, a huge green pail on her head, carrying water. What is striking about this image is that the woman is clambering up a rocky hill without dropping her baby or spilling the water. Her clothes are colorful, but the land is parched, barren. Water is in short supply, and managing its household use is a priority for women in many parts of the world. I have experienced forms of water rationing. As a child during a serious drought in Canada, the water holes dried up on my grandfather’s farm, and well water had to be carried to the cattle in buckets. One dry season, in Marin County, California, my friend Dedo Faiola warned me to watch how often I flushed the toilet. Even in New York City, we have experienced water alerts when reservoirs were not at full capacity. Women, I reflected, are the water carriers and men are the weapons carriers in many societies. <File under “Women and the Environment.”>

Next, an article by Stephen Jay Gould, the most readable writer on natural history I know, caught my attention. In it, he compared the mid 19th century evolutionary theories of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Charles Dar-

win. Lamarck is best remembered for his theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics or the hypothesis of use and disuse, for which he gave the example of giraffes who stretched their necks to get food and then passed this trait to their descendants. He also proposed, in 1802, the word "biology" for the study of living things. Gould refers to the earlier taxonomic scheme proposed by Linnaeus as a "Procrustean scheme" that Lamarck would soon alter in the spirit of system building (*l'esprit de système*) that was not always supported by empirical data. Lamarck's reputation suffered in comparison to Darwin's, and his theory of the heritability of acquired traits is ridiculed to this day. We are more persuaded by Darwin's theories of natural selection and survival of the fittest. Through a careful analysis of newly-available notes, Gould sets out to rectify this injustice to Lamarck by examining neglected aspects of his theories. What struck me in this article was Gould's comment that:

L'esprit de système, the propensity of constructing complete and overarching explanations based on general and exceptionless principles, may apply to some *corners of reality* but works especially poorly in the maximally complex world of natural history. (20, emphasis mine)

Corners of reality! I had recently been taken by Nietzsche's usage of the word "Winkel"—which I translate as "corner"—in my ruminations on perspective. There was the same metaphor in Gould's piece! The metaphor probably applies as well to social phenomena found in the "corners of reality" human beings inhabit and in the even smaller corners that women have been allowed to occupy. It seems as true of social as of natural history that:

Rigid systematizers often misconstrue natural patterns by forcing their observations into rigidly preconceived structures of explanation [while those who] approach nature on her own terms, without preferred hypotheses to test, risk being overwhelmed by a deluge of confusing information or falling prey to biases that become all the more controlling by their unconscious (and therefore unrecognized) status. (77-8)

How apt this comment was for my present predicament. My own unexpected data collection for that one day relied on both internal and external factors to produce a changed worldview. When an old logic fails to account for new evidence, then a new logic must be formulated to accommodate the novel findings. As Gould observes:

Our understanding of nature must always reflect a subtle interac-

tion between messages from genuine phenomena truly out there in the real world, and the necessary filtering of such data through all the foibles and ordering devices internal to the human mind and its evolved modes of action. We cannot comprehend nature's complexity ... unless we impose our mental theories of order upon the overt chaos that greets our senses. (77)

My personal interest as a theorist was aroused because of Lamarck's need to fit anomalous examples into some kind of framework. What do you do with anomalies that don't fit into a preconceived category? It seems one can iterate, or make repeated use, of a particular line of thought, or one can brachiate, or branch off, from an established course or line of reasoning. In my school texts, I have used the concept of ladders and lattices to convey a similar notion. My tendency is to revisit old ideas and then branch off where they invite refinements that would include the perspective from women's "corner of reality." <File under "Theory.">

The data I collected that day had significance for my personal biography and at the same time fit into generally accepted categories as noted in my plans to <file>. What "foibles and ordering devices" had informed my choices? What logic had directed them? What mental "theories of order" (categories) might I have imposed on the "overt chaos" that, like spaghetti strewn on the kitchen floor, my selections represented?

The deluge of information that day came not just from print sources but from TV as well. My one-day experiment in personal information processing coincided with the ongoing Clinton impeachment trial. The president's travails were conspicuous in the print and electronic media. The Senate pushed through a plan to depose Monica Lewinsky, Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., and Sidney Blumenthal (A1, 14). < File under "Impeachment."> On this day, my "Impeachment" file took up four file drawers.

On TV, Hillary Rodham Clinton made a speech at a gathering of mayors in Washington. She got a standing ovation. C-Span2's "Book TV" carried a previously taped (January 25) discussion by Paul Finkelman, author of *Impeachable Offenses* and a Professor at the University of Akron's law school. He made a clearly reasoned case for the distinction between lying and perjury as well as the definition of what constitutes a "high crime or misdemeanor." In the British system on which our Constitution is based, these terms would include both maladministration and malfeasance in office. On the same day, there were frequent repeats of Alan Greenspan's warn-

ing that the surplus in the national budget needs to be carefully allocated. James Billington discussed his book *The Face of Russia* at the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Relations. He warned of Russia's coming rendezvous with destiny. Like most Americans, he said nothing about the degree to which the United States and other Western capitalists should share responsibility for Russia's financial collapse in 1998.

There was much more of moment on TV and in newspapers and magazines that day—probably more ideas than there had been spaghetti sticks on my floor. While I picked up all the spaghetti and used some of it, I picked up only a few pictures and articles. My focus was on items of interest to me. Other items were consigned to the periphery, and I was vaguely aware of other events going on in the world. But these were the key ideas absorbed that day, and I think they were probably typical. What did I learn from this unexpected and unplanned exercise in information processing? *First*, no one can be “on top” of all the information he/she needs to be au courant on all the matters that affect one's life at a given time. For as long as we live, we must work with incomplete and hence imperfect knowledge. Some things are far beyond our control, and the notion that we have any direct control of them is an illusion. *Second*, each of us works with our own internal radar, scanning the horizon for information and zeroing in on just that part of the available material that captures our interest. *Third*, we all operate within time constraints of a day, a week, a year, a life. *Fourth*, most information is sited and stored in pre-existing categories. People adopt new categories with difficulty, and *Fifth*, and perhaps most important, issues and topics of concern to women interface both privately and publicly with the leading issues and concerns of the times.

“Everyday Stuff”: The 24-Hour Woman

In the middle of trying to process and categorize the disparate pieces of one day's deluge of information, my guests arrived. It was time to make supper. The meal was well received, and my friends took the story of the spilled spaghetti with good humor. Much of our talk related to the impeachment trial and the forthcoming trio of witnesses. When my friends left close to midnight, I straightened up, did the dishes, refrigerated leftovers, and once again turned to the pile of newspapers, books, and notes next to my computer (which had gone to sleep). But I was still awake and ready to input more information!

It was almost midnight when I picked up, at the suggestion of one of my guests, playwright Laura Hembree, the "Weekend: Movies/Performing Arts" section of the *Times* (D1). Hearing of my thought experiment, she called my attention to a forthcoming series of films directed by women. Call it serendipity. Call it the Zeitgeist, but on the front page were the words: "Women's Work: Still Never Done."

That refrain is so commonplace we take it for granted. The words echoed my experience that day! They introduced a short piece about a new film starring Rosie Perez as a workaholic wife and mother. The film is about the home:work crunch so many contemporary women (including myself and my daughter-in-law) experience. It began when I graduated from college, found a job, got married, got pregnant, had a baby, left my job, started a five-year freelance career, and went back to graduate school. With my son in school, I went back to fulltime employment, got a graduate degree, entered college teaching, got another graduate degree, got divorced, got tenure. Then I became a mother-in-law and a grandmother. Somewhere along the way I managed to write some books, some articles, and run a decade of Women's Studies conferences at Lehman College.

"The 24-Hour Woman" was part of a special series of women's films that reviewer Janet Maslin calls "so alert to the experiences and sensibilities of women that they could never be mistaken for the work of men" (E10). However, a man (Richard Guay) did collaborate with Nancy Samboca on the screenplay. Although the film was not judged an artistic success, by using the real dilemmas a real woman faces in a real world where women are expected to make real choices and must suffer real consequences, it affirms my belief that women need a feminism that recognizes the importance of the invisible people-making work on which a society—indeed a civilization—depends. It leaves open the question of why more of that work is not done by men. When Ms. Samboca's 24-hour woman who "has it all" (high-powered glamour job, handsome, self-absorbed husband, a woman boss, a baby, a mother-in-law) says, "What I wanna do is deal with the little everyday stuff—the little everyday stuff that drives us crazy," I feel she is looking over my shoulder as I try to develop a feminist theory/philosophy of everyday life.

The second part of the weekend section devoted to "Fine Arts and Leisure" included a review of the works of 19th century photographer Julia Margaret Cameron (E1, 33). Cameron was a great aunt of Virginia Woolf, who parodied her in her comic play *Freshwater*. The photographic images

are rather haunting, and the family story embedded in the portraits is that of the writer Virginia Woolf whose *To the Lighthouse* would become a feminist classic. We are invited to view the portraits of our Victorian foremothers. <File under "Women and the Arts.">

I had almost missed this part of the day's news. Yet it was relevant to my concerns about feminism's relation to women's everyday lives. Can women keep a feminist focus in all the categories of knowledge—politics, international law, education, economics, the media, and the arts? Is there any theoretical or philosophical perspective that can pull them all together? How can one theorize the invisible, the mundane, the unremarkable events that constitute the "everyday stuff" of daily life? How might one calculate the benefit to humankind of the numerous counter-entropic acts like picking up spilled pasta and fetching water that are performed everywhere, every day, to keep the human species fed, clothed, and housed, and to care for the young, old, and infirm? Work such as managing households and setting our near environment in order is counter-entropic work. And it is generally unappreciated. As women exercise their initiative and autonomy in the invisible private world, the actions of women in the public world, like Madeline Albright and Charlene Barshevsky, gain front-page status.

How can we process the disparate information that bombards us every single day and still get supper on the table? Is it possible to tie together the interests of women from different social, economic, and cultural situations in a single overarching feminist paradigm? How do we describe women who have as much or more power than many men? Is gender a sufficiently specific category to assure a shared perspective on a variety of issues? That is a question I often ask myself and which I hope to address in this book.

Bedtime Reading: Catherine Bateson and Laura Duhan Kaplan

My personal habit is to read before going to bed. At bedtime, I usually re-read books already marked and commented on. Some are like old friends, turned to time and again because they offer insight into the matters that always seem to contest for primacy in women's private and public worlds, in their mental and emotional lives, in their practical and intellectual involvements. This night I took out two books written by women of different generations: *Composing a Life* (1989) by cultural anthropologist Catherine Bateson, a former president of Amherst College, and *Family Pictures* (1998) by a younger scholar, Laura Duhan Kaplan, a professor of philosophy, di-

rector of a women's studies program, and the mother of two young children. Both authors deal with issues that surface as women go about living their lives. I have met both women, and their books seem to be accurate projections of who and what they are. Both share a quality I admire—authenticity. Whether or not either writer self-identifies as “feminist,” each has something important to say to other women—and to men if they will listen. Both books are intimate, self-disclosing, and invite the reader into the author's life while, at the same time, examining issues of fundamental importance to our ability to live ethically and creatively. In the parts that follow I will try to represent this intimacy by using the authors' first names: Catherine and Laura.

Catherine has called women “peripheral visionaries” who can follow several trains of thought (or activities) at the same time. That had certainly been true of my life that day! Thus the way women think, or at least the way some women think, may have characteristics that are not recognized or valued by male-dominated society. Catherine recognizes the discontinuities and conflicted priorities women (including her friends) encounter in the conduct of everyday life. She speaks of life as an improvisatory art (3), a collage of different tasks (9), and she observes that women have always lived discontinuous and contingent lives (13). The great challenge is to make the pieces fit into what she calls “a composite life,” a task that poses the recurring riddle of what the parts have in common (15). She concludes that it is possible to weave something new from many different threads (16). This involves “a continual reimagining of the future and reinterpretation of the past to give meaning to the present” (29-30).

In a chapter titled “Fits and Starts,” which seemed peculiarly apt for the day I had just experienced, she reflects on female personifications of wisdom in Eastern and Western traditions. She comments on a curious leap from female deities and archetypes to the problems of actual women. Usually, she says, we think of wisdom in terms of “lofty abstractions, not survival skills, absolute truths, not tactful equivocations.” Then she comments that “No one expects Athena to be streetwise, even less do we expect that virgin goddess to be what you might call hearthwise, to embody a home-spun wisdom of relationships and sensory richness” (231). The unmarked goddess who represents the “hearthwise” paradigm of wisdom would have to be the aforementioned Hestia, goddess of the hearth and the household, the subject of Chapter 4 in this book. Catherine concludes by saying “the central survival skill is surely the capacity to pay attention and respond to

changing circumstances, to learn and adapt, to fit into new environments beyond the safety of the temple precincts" (231).

To reflect on my spaghetti-scattering experience, is it possible to search for meaning in every problem? The strategies we follow are not strategies for victory but, as Catherine observes, strategies for survival and adaptation (239). Early in her book, she refers to an "internal gyroscope" that helps to keep us centered, a quality, as I hope to show through my own research and writing, is also related to Hestia. My personal goal is to be centered and connected at the same time, and much of this book will deal with the "internal gyroscope" that points to this hearthwise goddess as an archetypal orientation that influences one's perspective and which—I will argue—suggests an alternative basis for a feminist paradigm with humanist implications.

In a similar vein, Laura's book *Family Pictures: A Philosopher Explores the Familiar* (1998), written in the genre of narrative philosophy, is filled with the wonder of conjugal love, family relationships, and motherhood. In it, Laura reflects on how her academic specialty provides insight into her personal life experiences. She raises classical questions about ethics, truth, knowledge and personal identity. At a meeting of the Society for Philosophy in the Contemporary World, I heard her presentation "I Married an Empiricist" which became a chapter in her book. On their Hawaiian honeymoon Laura, a phenomenologist, and her husband, psychologist Charles Kaplan, experienced two radically different Hawaiis (17). She experienced the "meditative Hawaii," examined subjectively through introspection, while he experienced the "quantitative Hawaii," explored objectively with his camera. Her honeymoon companion (in addition to her husband, of course) was a book by Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature* (1978). Her husband's companions were his camera, compass, and maps. Perhaps each was responding to a different internal gyroscope. Those internal gyroscopes seem to me to have little to do with gender.

Laura reflects on the importance of being at home with oneself and others. This reflects a hearthwise sensibility evocative of Hestia. Speaking of her late mother-in-law, Laura understands her feeling that "When her house was in order; her inner life was in order" (43). She looks at the meaning of everyday activities—from raising children to ridding her household of an infestation of fleas. She ruminates on the phenomenological tradition in philosophy that shifts our focus to internal rather than external states of being as well as on the interconnectedness of experience so that "every ex-

perience contains the seeds of past and future experiences." Thus we can see "the fullness, not the separateness of every moment in our lives" (20, cit. om.). Thus Laura is echoing Catherine's words in the epigraph of this chapter. Laura reflects on how our values—embedded as they are in epistemology, ethics, and esthetics—guide decisions made in the contexts of real life activities. This is an idea I have tried to incorporate over three decades of writing Life Skills texts for schoolage youth. As a feminist, I have to question whether the best source of insight for such experience lies in abstract argument or in concrete experience. Since both women and men have both abstract arguments and concrete experiences, gender does not seem a reliable organizing principle for how and why these two may not converge or coincide. Is it possible to find other explanations that provide coherence and consistency in human lives marked by such inane contingencies as spilling a package of spaghetti?

Laura observes that her mother-in-law, unwittingly to be sure, could serve as an example of a "self" possessing a "core identity" or "organizing consciousness" that "remembers, perceives, and organizes selectively as it forms a life" (47), a situation I had experienced that very day as I read the news and later returned to the books I had read before and underlined. In general, as Laura observes, any theory can be disputed by a counterexample (25). What, I wonder, would happen if we were to look for new meanings after we accumulate a sufficient number of counterexamples, what researchers consider anomalies? Might it be possible to discern one or more alternative paradigms?

I believe feminism's efforts to clarify issues related to "standpoint" offers a promising route to thinking ourselves out of patriarchy. Rather than identifying competing gender perspectives, we may be able to discern complementary human ones. While I cannot do justice to Catherine's and Laura's books in such brief selections, their similar perspective compels my attention. Having struggled to make sense of a day that had not turned out as I had planned, it was reassuring to think that intelligent and accomplished women had experienced the same combination of challenge and frustration. Reflecting on the traditional body/mind dualism that pervades the history of Western philosophy, Laura makes a telling point:

A philosophy that has no relationship with the world of action, the world of bodies tainted by the problems of daily living, would be disingenuous, inaccurate, useless, and even immoral. It would be disingenu-

ous because it would deny its own origins. (64)

The questions I explore in this book lie with the household-centered daily lives, activities, and concerns that the ancient Greeks associated with Hestia, goddess of the hearth.

Reflections at the Close of Day

The sum total of a single day's experience raises questions of necessity, chance, and contingency as inevitable aspects of the human condition. It also presents opportunities for creativity and imagination in designing a life that is ethically and esthetically satisfying. What attracted me to Catherine's and Laura's books is their similar perspective and worldview—a view from life's center that is often dismissed as too personal or private to have general applicability. If this is a constant, is it necessarily a perspective rooted in gender? Or do all those who care about relationships experience the world, at least *sometimes*, the same way?

At the end of my day, I thought sleep "that knits up the raveled sleeve of care" might let my ideas find their way into new patterns that explain the common predicaments confronted by women in everyday life. In reading, my past had empowered my present. The newspaper items were something of a patchwork, assembled through choices guided by my internal gyroscope. Having enjoyed my conversation with friends at dinnertime and with Catherine and Laura through their books at bedtime, I thought again about the hearthwise goddess Hestia who, I felt, provided the metaphorical bridge between these women thinkers. I fell asleep—so far as I know, a dreamless sleep—content, from my personal perspective, that I had lived a good day.

On waking the next morning, I was tempted to read the papers, listen to TV, and update the material recorded the day before. Except for minor editing, I decided to let the words stand as a benchmark against which to test my observations in the remainder of this book and to see whether or not it is typical of the mental processes that inform my thinking, acting, and writing. Might it be that the greatest challenge to feminism in the coming millennium will be to accommodate woman-centered and feminist research in an over-arching paradigm that reflects the multi-faceted realities of everyday human life?

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