Utopian Iscourseso F Gendere Quality

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[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/15688/gender/v05/GCB-05

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look like in a real place? How have imaginations of gender influenced how gender roles and gender equity is constructed in political, social, and marketing discourse?

In the second paper Stevens and Maclaran question whether we have moved much beyond Bellamy's vision as they reflect on that cultural icon of the late 90s, Ally McBeal, arguably the most popular female character on television (Bellafante, 1998) and a figure that has captured the popular imagination of both women and men. Through Ally, David Kelley, her creator, offers an image of the professional woman as a frazzled, self-absorbed girl who spends most of her time fantasising about her failed love life. Stevens and Maclaran conclude that this portrayal of Ally McBeal is an archetype of femininity defined by men: a man's woman, a little girl lost, an incomplete woman/child in need of a man/adult to make her whole. As such, Ally may even represent a retrogressive step in gender equality.

In the third paper Heilbrunn explores the power of contemporary brands to shape sexual roles and identities. Using a semiotic square of 'maleness' as defined by Greimas (1983) and Floch (1990), Heilbrunn positions leading brands on this square to discuss their representations of masculinity and femininity. Through this square he then considers the use of the 'endrogynon' position by companies such as Calvin Klein, and suggests that the power of such brands may lie in their ability to blur gender boundaries. In addition, he shows that these androgynous images are not necessarily gender neutral and that they are still defined by their relationship to an overarching category of 'maleness'. The paper demonstrates how these brands try to help individuals to renegotiate their sexual identities by playing alternatively on the various sexual positions offered by the square. Hence, there is an essential circulation process around these positions which in turn may offer a potential transformation of sexual roles.

Summary of Individual Papers

Utopian Discourses of Gender Equality

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Edward Bellamy's famous 1888 best-seller Looking Backward: 2000–1887 imagined a paradisical world where social and economic problems of poverty, strife, class, and war were eliminated through a utopian political economy based on socialist principles. Equality is central to Bellamy's vision, and his notion of gender equality, in particular, was further articulated in the sequel to Looking Backward, Equality (1898). Although his
conception of gender equality has been criticized (e.g. Patai 1988), his emphasis on equality as a necessary condition for a just society is important within utopian discourses.

This presentation takes a look at gender in operation in Bellamy's thought, and then compare and contrast this to present-day Sweden, recently reported to be the most gender equitable country in the world (Swedish Institute 1998). How does the discourse of gender equality function within utopian literature, mass media, and political discourse? What does a country look like that has put gender equality at the forefront of its political agenda? Sweden is by no means a gender utopia, and men dominate most important positions within business, government, and academia. However, the idea of gender equality permeates social and political discussion to the point that many in Sweden seem to believe gender is no longer a relevant issue (e.g. Pybus and Dunne 1995, Svensson 1996). I will discuss these issues, with particular attention to gender in advertising media and academia (the spheres I have most contact with).

This paper represents a broad look at gender at the millennium, with a focus on the image of gender equality constructed with Bellamy's utopian world in contrast to present day Scandinavian society. The method draws on recent interdisciplinary forays into images, with particular attention to linking meaning with power (Schroeder and Borgerson 1998; Schroeder and Zwick 2000). Representation is a central analytic concept for the analysis, representation also provides links to the other papers in the session (Hall 1997).

Bellamy's *Looking Backward* described a society of equals, with equal pay, centralized production and distribution, no advertising or marketing to speak of, and a unique conception of work. In Bellamy's year 2000, pay has been unhinged from labor. Everyone has access to the same amount of money, regardless of the type of work they do. Furthermore, inheritance has been eliminated, social class is obsolete, and economic competition is no more.

*Looking Backward* was a major success, and launched a political movement in the U.S. and abroad. As one Bellamy scholar wrote: "Few American novels have provoked as many and as varied political and literary responses as *Looking Backward*. The best seller of its time, it exerted a profound and enduring influence on vast numbers of working men and women as well as intellectuals, not only in the United States but throughout the rest of the world. It is a landmark of American literature, of American revolutionary thought, of the American socialist movement. It prompted scores of imitations and hundreds, probably thousands, of rebuttals" (Rosemont 1988:147). The novel sold a million copies and was widely translated. Bellamy's ideas sparked the formation of over 150 "nationalist" clubs based on his ideas—many of which still exist—and he influenced thinkers such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, John Dewey, Eugene Debs, Thorstein Veblen.

REFERENCES


