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Thinking (a Feminist) History: the Regulation Approach as Theatre

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Article abstract

The approach elaborated here is derived from feminist analyses which take seriously the notion that gender relations are social constructions. Using the metaphor of theatre, the article proposes an analysis which takes meaning systems as well as practices seriously. From this point of view, both the mode of regulation and the societal paradigm depend upon actors' strategies in creating their representational systems and thereby constructing their collective identities. Besides, contrary to studies that reduce regulation to the wage relation, this analysis points to the importance of many different political organisations and identities. In so doing, the argument provides a way of understanding why it is that some historical times are more open to recognising marginalised actors' demands for greater power while other moments ignore their claims by silencing their voices.

Thinking (a Feminist) History: the Regulation Approach as Theatre

Jane JENSON

In recent years social theory has undergone a paradigm shift[1]. Numerous theoretical traditions have criticised the dominance of structuralism and have sought to make their analysis sensitive to the role of agency in history. The consequence has been a re-thinking of history itself[2]. Both feminist theory and the regulation approach have participated in this paradigm shift. By addressing and working over its own concerns, each has produced a social theory which contributes to historical analysis.

This paper presents an approach to history which combines the attention to 'ideas' which is the legacy of much feminist theory and the periodisation of history which constitutes an important innovation of the regulation approach[3]. This

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[2] This shift is well expressed by Charles Tilly:
Both the turn away from developmental theories and the renaissance of Marxist thought have promoted a revival of genuinely historical work in the social sciences. By 'genuinely historical', I mean studies assuming that the time and place in which a structure or process appears make a difference to its character, that the sequence in which similar events occur has a substantial impact on their outcomes, and that the existing record of past structures and processes is problematic, requiring systematic investigation in its own right instead of lending itself immediately to social-scientific syntheses. *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*, New York, Russell Sage, 1984, p. 79.
[3] The approach presented here is derived from Jane Jenson, "'Different' but not 'Exceptional': Canada's Permeable Fordism", *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, vol. 26, no 1, 1989. "Paradigms and Political Discourse: Protective Legislation in France and the United States Before 1914", *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, XXII, June 1989; "Representations in Crisis: The Roots of Canada's Permeable Fordism", *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, vol. XXIII, no 4, december 1990; "All the World's a Stage: Space and Time in Canadian Political Economy", *Studies in Political Economy*, no 36, 1991. Some of it was developed in dialogue with Alain Lipietz. For his use of somewhat similar conceptualisation see, *inter alia.*, *La Trame, la chaîne et la régulation: Un outil pour les sciences sociales*, CEPREMAP, no 8816 and

combination is necessary, I believe, in order to overcome the long-standing limits on political analyse which the mainstream of the regulation approach continues to display. Only by doing so will the approach realise its potential to understand more fully the creativity of social life, opening the theatre of human history to full scrutiny and even re-writing the script of the future.

While making strides in the direction of a truly political sociology, the French version of the regulation approach continues to be restrained by its limpid commitment to political analysis — which limits its ability to 'think' agency questions — and by its deeply embedded assumption that the central regulatory practices can be located in the same institutions everywhere[4]. If it does not take seriously the lessons which feminism teaches about the links between meanings and practices and the variable ways in which actors can constitute their world under the same situation of constraint, the regulation approach will not succeed in throwing off the lingering effects of structuralist and functionalist analytic proclivities, nor will it provide an approach to social theory which is more than an analysis of industrial relations systems in flux.

Ideas and Agency

Concerns about both agency and time constitute central issues for historical sociology[5]. Both are about history, specifically how it is 'made'. It is precisely around attention to 'making history' that a meeting between the regulation approach and feminist analysis should occur.

One of the earliest intuitions of the women's movement, following Simone de Beauvoir's theoretically powerful insight in *The Second Sex*, is that 'women are made, not born'. By extension, this anti-essentialist insight compels us to think not only about the social construction of gender relations but also about the ways in which *all* social relations are constructed through action. This proposition calls forth analytical perspectives which are cognizant of the role of actors in human history and which are, therefore, empowering. It is as important an analytic

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"Governing the Economy" in J. Hollifield and G. Ross (eds), *Searching for the New France*, New York, Routledge, 1991.

[4]   The limits of political analysis in the regulation approach are well-presented and discussed in Alain Noël, "Action collective, politique partisane et relations industrielles", in G. Boismenu and D. Drache, *Politique et régulation: modèle de développement et trajectoire canadienne* , Montréal, Médirien, 1990. For another critique of the regulation apparoach's overly economic analysis see Jenson, "'Different' but not 'exceptional': Canada's Permeable Fordism", *article cité*.

[5]   See, for example, P. Abrams, *Historical Sociology* (Ithaca, New York, Cornell, University Press, 1982; or A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, Berkeley (CA), University of California Press, 1984. Tilly, in *Big Structures*, provides a useful epistemological and methodological discussion of this branch of social theory.

standpoint as Marx's well-known observation that people make history but not under conditions of their own choosing.

Since at least the late 1960s the women's movement has claimed the world must change, that long-standing forms of production, family, and gender relations cannot continue. Feminists' theoretical perspectives led them to consider the oppressive character of existing gender relations and the liberating potential of altered ones. Several such efforts involved extended attention to everyday life, because it is there that gender is socially constructed. A premise of the women's movement — out of which feminist analyses grew — was that the ways that women and men 'speak' about each other, about families, and about society set crucial limits on their struggles. Feminists were quick to recognise that in order for their lives to be 'made visible' women had to claim their voices and label their oppression. Thus their struggle is to compel others to take them and their ideas seriously. For these reasons the 'feminist turn' has involved thinking about the power of ideas to organise our lives and define our interests[6].

Feminism's attention to ideas provides considerable impetus to social theory's turn away from structuralism towards theorising which took actors and their strategies into account. The regulationists too have sought to make the same shift, sometimes choosing to characterise themselves as 'the rebel sons of Althusser'[7]. This label is meaningful, however, only to the extent that the approach takes agency seriously. One step, to be sure, is to use abstract concepts like 'regime of accumulation' or even 'Fordism' in ways which identify historical specificity; concepts must not be fetishised[8]. Nevertheless, the cataloguing of specific trajectories of national-level models of development is insufficient if the analysis always begins from the assumption that models everywhere result from the activities of the *same* set of actors and institutions. A truly sociological regulation approach would also recognise that it is possible — even likely — that a range of institutions and actors will participate in the constitution of the various models of development and in their crises.

Working with this understanding of specificity means addressing the structure/agency dilemma directly — no easy task to be sure! It is not surprising

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[6] For one discussion of feminism's contribution to the politics of identity, including the variability of feminist consciousness, see Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (eds.) *Feminism as Critique*, Minneapolis (MN), University of Minnesota, 1987, Introduction. Of course, feminists have not been alone in re-focussing social theory on ideas. Two other important currents are neo-marxism and neo-institutionalism. For a discussion of the latter's contribution see J. Jenson, "All the World's a Stage", p. 45-46.

[7] A. Lipietz, "Rebel Sons: The Regulation School" interview in *French Politics and Society*, vol. 5, no 1987, p. 19 and *Mirages and Miracles: The Crises of Global Fordism*, London, Verso, 1987, p. 16 et suiv.

[8] A. Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles, op. cit.*p. 24 et suiv.

that structuralism is so appealing.   Arguments couched in its terms are parsimonious and forceful, based on powerful laws — those of capitalism or patriarchy, for example. Nevertheless, such forms of argumentation are limited because they are general, and particular cases may not follow exactly the same trajectory. Moreover, they tend to rob subjects of their subjectivity, treating them as mere *trägers* or victims[9]. Agency-centred arguments are enticing, therefore, because they stress strategy and provide accounts of historical variety. The problem is that they are often messy, being full of contingencies.

Needed is a way of thinking about history which avoids the tendency to swing the analytic pendulum too widely. A beginning point is to assume, as the regulation approach does, that history is open-ended[10]. But it is only a beginning. How is history open-ended? It is most obviously open-ended to the extent that we do not know its outcome. But it is also open-ended because it is the consequence of the everyday strategic actions and unintended consequences. If actors *are* actors — that is, endowed with the ability to act strategically — their actions create the different histories which they live. Thus focussing on the politics of action is as important as structural analysis; neither can be abandoned.

From this perspective politics is *always* 'identity politics'. Politics always involves actors struggling for recognition of themselves and their interests[11]. The implication of this conceptual starting point is that analysis must always give attention to the constitution of actors and their strategies. From this perspective politics can be seen as involving actors' efforts to create their constituency by generating support for their preferred formulation of their own collective identity (and often that of their protagonists) and for the enumeration of their interests, which follow from that collective identity. This definition of politics depends upon an understanding of the dual aspects of representation. One type of representation involves actors' *representation of self* to others, via a collective identity. A second type, familiar from the language of liberal democracy, is the *representation of interests*[12]. These two senses of the term representation are

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[9] For a discussion of the costs of such forms of analysis for the New Canadian Political economy, see Rianne Mahon in "Review Symposium: New Developments in Comparative Political Economy", *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, vol. 14, 1989, p. 502. For a general discussion, see E. MacDonald, "The Trouble With Subjects: Feminism, Marxism and the Questions of Post-Structuralism", *Studies in Political Economy*, no 35, Summer 1991.

[10] A. Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles, op.cit.,* p. 15.

[11] To say that politics is always identity politics is to take issue with those who would characterise the present moment of turbulence as one in which 'identity politics' is central, while failing to see that in earlier moments politics also constituted identities. Se J. Jenson, "The Feminism of Permeable Fordism", *New left Review*, no 84, 1990, p. 61-62; and "All the World's a Stage", p. 48-49.

[12] As the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing put it with regard to elections and liberal democracy:

closely linked by the fact that both involve power, namely the power to give meaning to social relations and thereby to represent and dispute interests[13].

But not everything is possible. Even if identities and the interests to which they give meaning are never other than subjective and relative, specific conjunctures do nevertheless give greater weight to some identities and their definitions of interest, because of the form of social relations at that particular time[14]. Structural constraints do exist. Therefore, the argument being developed here also depends on making an analytic distinction between the esoteric level of on-going structures and the exoteric realm of everyday life, or Marx's 'enchanted world'[15]. With this distinction, analysis starts at two points, each of which produces a different 'story'. The first story — that of the esoteric level — is based on the long-standing observation, which forms the heart of social theory, that structured social relations continue through time, whether or not participants comprehend the social constraints on the ways they construct their lives. The knowledge derived from this story of the esoteric makes possible the theoretical demonstration of the basic proposition of the regulation approach, that social relations form structures whose contradictions are temporarily regulated and thereby stabilised. Building on this observation, the movement of history can be described with categories that identify its patterns.

In one sense representation... identifies those represented, designates representatives and legitimizes institutional processes for securing agreements and resolving conflicts. In another and more fundamental sense, representative governance incorporates a society's definition of itself as a political community. Distinctions about who has a legitimate claim to political power are established in elections. In the process, a society definition of itself as a political community. Distinctions about who has a legitimate claim to political power are established in elections. In the process, a society pronounces whether it is open or closed to the claims of its citizens... In this respect, a society is explicitly representing itself. *Reforming Electoral Democracy*, vol. 1, Ottawa, 1992, p. 8.

[13] Resolution of basic definitional questions about the identity of the central protagonists places broad limits on the definition of interests of actors and also makes such definitions historical rather than 'objective'. In these terms the emergence of a universalising class identity in advanced capitalist societies was — and remains — the result of struggle in concrete circumstances. Success for class institutions in particular times and places should be measured by their ability to shape a meaning system which represented class-based collective identities and political interests as coterminous and to develop strategies to impose their worldview, including their definition of interests, on others. J. Brodie and J. Jenson, *Crisis, Challenge and Change: Party and Class in Canada Revisited*, Ottawa, Carleton University Press, 1988, chapter 1.

[14] For a similar discussion see B. Jessop, *The Capitalist State*, Oxford, Martin Robertson, 1982, p. 255-258.

[15] This section on the esoteric/exoteric distinction depends upon my reading of Ricardo Hausmann and A. Lipietz, *Esoteric vs Exoteric Economic Laws: The Forgotten Dialectic*, CEPREMAP, no 8021, 1980. The argument is incorporated in A. Lipietz, *The Enchanted World: Inflation, Credit and the World Crisis*, London, Verso, 1985.

The starting point for the second story — that of the exoteric level — is the claim that only by acknowledging the importance of strategic choices and the unintended consequences of actions can we understand how (temporarily) stable arrangements of social relations are constituted and sustained. Only in this way can social theorists account for and analyse the ways in which, despite the contradictory nature of social relations, an ensemble of institutional forms, networks, and explicit or implicit norms emerge, live and die. Lived experience is a process of learning generating acceptance or modification of usual ways of stabilising contradictions.

When both these stories are told and both the esoteric and exoteric knowledge examined, history becomes a dialectical process, — being the open-ended result of actors struggling to create their lives. Actors are, simultaneously, subjects of social structures which persist regardless of whether the subjects perceive them, and acting subjects carrying in their practices and the meaning systems which motivate them, the possibilities of not only reproduction but also social change and transformation.

From this perspective, representation, as defined above, is as 'real' as the intrinsic connections which are visible only once the informed analyst has removed the 'obscurity'[16]. Underpinning actors' strategies in the market, in the family, in bed, in the workplace, in school, etc., are the representations of social relations they make of themselves and of others[17]. The representations expressed via such strategies are never 'false', although they may be — from the perspective of an analysis of the esoteric — incomplete. This level of reality can be ignored only at the analyst's peril, moreover, because politics consists of struggles to sustain or change the power of such representations, as the women's movement has long understoodb[18]. They form part of a dialectic; structural analysis is not a substitute for understanding the power of representations and the strategies they generate, nor vice versa.

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[16] On the distinction between intrinsic connections and appearance see Haussman and Lipietz, *Esoteric vs Exoteric*, 1-2; *passim*.

[17] For a discussion of the importance of such strategies for entrepreneurship see A. Lipietz, "Reflections on a Tale: The Marxist Foundations of the Concepts of Regulation and Accumulation", *Studies in Political Economy*, no 26, 1988, p. 29-30.

[18] The struggles of workers' movements to elaborate and disseminate an alternative to market theory is an obvious example here. Nevertheless, another obvious example comes from the contemporary women's movement struggle — and success — in creating the category 'women', an actor unencumbered by a familial or other adjectival designation. See J. Jenson, "Changing Discourse, Changing Agenda: Political Rights and Reproductive Policies in France", in M. F. Katzenstein and C. M. Mueller, *The Women's Movements of the United States and Western Europe*, Philadelphia (PA), Temple University Press, 1987. Another example comes from sexual politics. For an excellent discussion of strategic conflicts over gay identities see Stephen Epstein, "Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity: The Limits of Social Construction", *Socialist Review*, no 93-94.

The terrain on which actors struggle over representation is the *universe of political discourse*, within which identities are socially constructed[19]. Because actors with a variety of collective identities co-exist in this universe, their practices and meaning systems jostle one another for attention and legitimacy and politics becomes conflict about collective identities — about *who* has a right to make claims — as much as it is conflict among groups and organisations over disputed claims about who gets what, when, and how. But it is also struggle about *where* politics occurs, designating the spaces which actors understand to be 'political'. Whether they describe an issue as 'public' or 'private', 'national', 'global' or 'local', 'of the family' or 'of the state' is a crucial element of their representation of self and their interests.

If representation involves, among other things, naming oneself, only an actor with a name is recognisable to others. Successful contenders for political and ideological influence can recognise themselves when they have an identity and it makes them recognisable to others. The specific actors named in any case depend upon relations of power — which are limited by structural relationships but not determined by them — because such relations organise the conflict over mutual recognition. Competition for representational power, in other words, constitutes a system of inclusion and exclusion, in which only some collective identities are constituted. Nevertheless, competing meanings for the same social relation may continue to exist in the shadowy world of the universe of political discourse, perpetuated by the practices of marginalised actors. There are moments, moreover, when these alternatives are reasserted, making claims for the future, and bringing with them new definitions of legitimate actors and political spaces.

These moments are precisely the moments of 'crises' about which the regulation approach speaks so eloquently. Moreover, such crises are never only the consequence of reaching certain structural limits. Crises arise as newly visible actors in the expanding universe of political discourse present alternatives and struggle over representations of the past, present and future.

Periodisation of time

The regulation approach provides a periodisation of advanced capitalism in terms of modes of regulation. As such it makes the general point that history can be divided — more or less neatly — into two sorts of time: moments of stability and moments of crisis. Thinking in terms of representation, these two kinds of moments have quite different characteristics. While arguing here that politics always involves processes of representation and the social construction of collective identities, the argument is also that moments of crisis are more open to

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[19] For a discussion of the universe of political discourse see J. Jenson, "Gender and Reproduction: Or, babies and the state", *Studies in Political Economy*, no 20, 1986.

innovation in identities, their meaning systems, and political practice than are those of stability[20]. At such moments turbulence exists in the universe of political discourse, such that debates challenge not only distributional effects but also the very boundaries of politics and the right of some actors to make claims. Under such conditions, alternative meaning systems and practices proliferate in the universe of political discourse. At other times, however, a relative societal consensus about the names of the actors, their interests, and political spaces exists. Conflict takes place within the terms of an on-going representational regime.

The analytic stance adopted shares the scepticism about system reproduction that has always characterised the regulation approach, which asks how social relations take on stabilised forms, even though they are contradictory. Longish periods of economic and social stability do occur (with the best known being Fordism), during which a set of institutional forms, procedures and habits reproduce social relations, forming a model of development[21].

A model of development is the particular achievement of each national society. It is a combination of institutionalised social relations which reproduce over time; thus it is composed of the practices and meanings which sustain structures. Throughout the history of capitalism situations, have existed of long-term stabilisation in the allocation of social production between the consumption and accumulation. The existence of such a *regime of accumulation* implies a certain correspondence between the transformation of the conditions of production and the reproduction of wage-labour, including between certain modalities in which capitalism is articulated with other modes of production within a national social formation[22]. A *social bloc* composed of a stable system of alliances, compromises, and patterns of domination among social groups provides a good match for the regime of accumulation. While the leading fraction of the capitalist class may 'place its stamp' on the model of development, and is likely to be a dominant political force, its political position depends upon its ability to participate in a project which can secure the consent of virtually all important

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[20] That these moments are open to innovation does not mean that the innovations will result in greater 'openeness' or political pluralism. Moments of crises are often characterised by political narrow-mindedness, if not repression. Such politics often takes the form of sexism, racism nationalism or other fears of 'difference'. The fears about identity which characterise moments of crisis are no doubt the basis of such political sectarianism. For an application of this notion to the current constitutional crisis in Canada and Quebec see G. Breton and J. Jenson, "La Nouvelle dualité canadienne: L'Entente de libre-échange et l'après-Meech", in L. Balthazar *et al.* (eds), *Le Québec et la restructuration du Canada*, Sillery, Editions du Septentrion, 1991.
[21] For A. Lipietz the *trouvailles* of social life which, at historically observable moments, allows systems of social relations crystallise, stalling contradictions at least for a time. See *Mirages and Miracles, op. cit.*, p. 15.
[22] A. Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles, op. cit.* p. 32.

groups in any social formation[23]. The unity and opposition of the social relations within the regime of accumulation and social bloc, stamp out *places*, which mark a trajectory through time[24].

A model of development, composed of places, whose reproduction over time indicates that it is in regulation, does not occur magically. And, that it is stable certainly does not explain its existence. Explanations for its constitution and the ways in which it continues require additional conceptualisations which pay attention to the representations with which actors organise social relations as well as through their practices. Patterns which in the eyes of observers constitute quite similar structures, can be represented by actors in quite diverse, albeit coherent and meaningful ways. Actors experience and represent a social relation as if it were the product of their own strategy in playing a particular *part*. Moreover, since the strategy is selected by each actor, albeit acting within the constraints of that part, the result is a great deal of variation in possible representational *styles*.

In this discussion of structures representations, and levels of analysis, a new metaphor has emerged. Gone is the image of the heavy weight of structures 'bearing down' on actors, creating agentless structures. But neither is this a world of Robinson Crusoe and Friday 'choosing' to establish a hierarchically organised society in a world of structureless agents. The argument here, in all its complexity, leads to the metaphor of history as theatre.

A play usually has a well-defined form (following the structure of a tragedy, for example) but each drama has its own roles and relationships, which constitute it, providing the material of that particular work. Thus, the surface difference of names and places can be 'swept away' by the observer who sees its structure in the form of the play. Nevertheless, it is not a play until it has been given particular material that is, until the content has been defined[25]. Therefore, within the structure of the play, parts are assigned by the author in compliance with the underlying form and according to limits which make it possible for each character to do some things and impossible to do others. Actors' parts are, in other words, constrained by the form (or structure) of the drama. At the same time, the assigned parts themselves serve as constraints on each actor performing the play. Lines

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[23] For a thorough discussion of the theoretical lineage of the concept of social bloc see R. Mahon, *Politics of Industrial Restructuring: Canadian Textiles* , Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1984, p. 9 et suivantes. For the joint use of regime of accumulation and social bloc, with reference to postwar France, see A. Lipietz, "Governing the Economy".

[24] For a discussion of such trajectories see A. Lipietz, *La Trame, la chaîne, op. cit.*, p. 8 et suivantes.

[25] Even the most basic laws of capitalism never operate in the abstract, just as no 'tragedy' exists without its story. The only 'reality' is one which already has — because of its history — a specificity to its model of development derived from the dialectical relationship of the esoteric and exoteric.

must be said, entries and exits made, according to the logic set out by the plot of the play. Nevertheless, the strategies for interpreting each role, within such limits, belong to the actors. The politics of the production may lead them to choose to redefine the historical time of a traditional play by presenting it in modern dress. They may choose to play dramatic roles with greater or lesser degrees of comedy or seriousness. They may adorn the set or leave it empty. There are, indeed, innumerable styles for playing a part, yet it always remains a role, limited by the author's material, in accordance with the underlying form of the drama[26].

The interest of this metaphor lies in the observation that even within constraints there is, simultaneously, a mutability and unpredictability due to the variations in styles, so that an innovative and creative style of playing the parts can transform the play instead of simply reproducing it. The styles of any production may be 'true' to the author's intentions, retaining a long-established interpretative style. Other styles may alter the play by changing the setting, the gests, the movements of the actors, but nevertheless the play remains recognisable in its original form. There are also, however, certain productions in which the alterations in the style, the refusal to attach the same meanings as in the original, the shift in perspective due to the actors' stylistic strategy for their parts transform the play into another — with another message, another meaning[27]. These transformations may succeed — and a new work of art result — or they may fail and the audience will leave the theatre with the heavy sense of just having witnessed an artistic crisis.

One consequence of taking this metaphor seriously is that analysis must provide ways to conduct concrete investigations of historically developed sets of practices and meanings which provide the actual mechanisms of regulation. Making a loose distinction between the realm of commodity and wage relations — the basic relations of production - and the domain of other social relations, these regulatory mechanisms become the *mode of regulation* and the *societal paradigm*.

Stabilisation of a regime of accumulation depends, then, upon its being institutionalised as norms, habits, and laws in a mode of regulation which guarantees that its agents conform, more or less, to the schema of reproduction in their day-to-day behaviour and in their struggles within contradictory social relations. When a set of practices, and the meanings which accompany them, succeed in stabilising a regime of accumulation, we can say a mode of regulation

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[26] For another discussion of these concepts see A. Lipietz, *La Trame, la chaîne, op. cit.*, p. 10.

[27] If society is always social, always composed of social relations, despite linking separate and autonomous actors, it is impossible to imagine a moment or a place without a play which instructs actors playing their parts. Even in crisis, actors still follow a script, although the changes in style may be so dramatic as to — in effect — transform it.

exists. Representations in this mode of regulation name the legitimate actors in the social relations of production, identify their interests, and locate the spaces of the 'politics of production'. A societal paradigm is, similarly, a shared set of interconnected norms, habits and laws which make sense of the many social relations beyond the realm of production[28].

If the sets os interconnected premises arising from a mode of regulation and a societal paradigm come to be widely shared as the result of a social compromise, they are hegemonic, and there are socially limited ways of living social relations which exist as effective constraints. By designating how to play the parts, these norms and institutions allocate actors to their places in social relations. Divergences are minimal and confined to disputes internal to the representational system itself; they are insufficient to undermine the regime of accumulation and the social bloc. The constitution of an hegemonic mode of regulation and societal paradigm, within which only some collective identities are represented, is the product of politics in its broadest sense. We can catalogue any number of institutions — ranging from political parties, trade unions and other social movements to the various apparatuses of the state, churches, corporations, families, and scientific establishments — as the multiple sites of its constitution.

Conclusion

In contrast to much analysis coming from the regulation approach, I am not privileging the state as an institution central to the co-ordination of regulation. Other institutions may be equally central. Thus, institutions of civil society which reflect the penetration of liberal democratic notions into civil society are of importance. Indeed, it is possible to conceive of liberal democratic norms as providing a kind of organising principle for regulating the mode of regulation and societal paradigm[29]. Similarly, familial arrangements and gender relations may not simply provide 'support' for the regulatory practices but actually be the site in which they are organised.

Which institutions contribute what to the constitution of regulation is nothing more than an empirical question. Identification of such institutions can

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[28] Just as the effects of wage and commodity relations spill over and organise many areas of life in capitalist society, so too are other social relations crucial for giving specific content to the realm of production. We know that the boundary between production and reproduction, work and not work, factory and home is always ultimately a blurred one. So too is the boundary between mode of regulation and societal paradigm, but the distinction is nonetheless useful for purposes of analysis. The concept of the societal paradigm is elaborated in J. Jenson, "Representations in Crisis", p. 665.

[29] G. Breton and C. Levasseur, "État, rapport salarial et compromis institutionalisés", in G. Boismenu and D. Drache, *Politique et régulation, op. cit.*

only occur when the method adopted is one of historical sociology, in which the role of actors making history — and the very representation of that history which they are making — provides a central focus of analysis.

The approach to analysing agency elaborated here is very much derived from those feminist analyses which take seriously the notion that gender relations are social constructions which result from the dialectic between the abstract analysis of structures and the specificity of historical circumstances. Therefore, the result of such an encounter of feminism and the regulation approach is an analysis which takes meaning systems as well as practices seriously. Both the mode of regulation and the societal paradigm depend upon actors' strategies in creating their representational systems and thereby constructing their collective identities. Secondly, it critiques traditional political economy — even much of the regulation approach and the many efforts to "politicise" it — for proceeding as if regimes of accumulation depend on the mobilization of a primary contradiction and single collective identity, around the practices of labour-based institutions. My argument points instead to the importance of many different political organisations and identities which institutionalise models of development. In analysing the variety of social relations, the historical openness of outcomes which create regulation and crisis, it reclaims a place for actors making choices in constraining but not interpellating structures. Lastly, this argument provides a way of understanding why it is that some historical times are more open to recognising marginalised actors' demands for greater power while other moments ignore their claims by silencing their voices.

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Résumé

L'approche présentée ici s'inspire des analyses féministes qui présentent les rapports de genres comme des constructions sociales. Utilisant la métaphore du théâtre, l'article propose une analyse qui accorde autant d'importance aux systèmes de significations qu'aux pratiques. De ce point de vue, tant le mode de régulation que le paradigme sociétal dépendent des stratégies par lesquelles les acteurs créent leurs systèmes de représentations et leurs identités collectives. Par ailleurs, contrairement aux études qui réduisent la régulation au rapport salarial, l'analyse proposée souligne l'importance d'organisations politiques et d'identités collectives diverses. Ce faisant, elle permet de comprendre comment certaines périodes sont plus favorables aux demandes de pouvoir d'acteurs politiques marginaux, alors que d'autres ne permettent même pas à ces acteurs de faire entendre leurs voix.

Summary

The approach elaborated here is derived from feminist analyses which take seriously the notion that gender relations are social constructions. Using the metaphor of theatre, the article proposes an analysis which takes meaning systems as well as practices seriously. From this point of view, both the mode of regulation and the societal paradigm depend upon actors' strategies in creating their representational systems and thereby constructing their collective identities. Besides, contrary to studies that reduce regulation to the wage relation, this analysis points to the importance of many different political organisations and identities. In so doing, the argument provides a way of understanding why it is that some historical times are more open to recognising marginalised actors' demands for greater power while other moments ignore their claims by silencing their voices.