

Humanities modern movements

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One fairly recent movement in the humanities is known as “gender-based archaeology,” of which there is exposition in the article “Programme to Practice: Gender and Feminism” (Conkey 1997). One example that the authors use to demonstrate that the field of archaeology has begun to change is the increasing studies which have “[recognized] female labor in a broad range of activities” in what “were once considered exclusively male domains” (Conkey 1997, 415). They stress the importance of “looking for women” projects which specifically seek to identify the tasks done by women in ancient societies which have erroneously been attributed to men.

The specific issue of gender, according to the authors, has begun to give new and added focus on the role of women. Archaeological research into gender varies from an emphasis on class and occupation to an interest into the ways in which the meaning of gender has evolved over time. As well, the authors point to a rise in biographies being written about female archaeologists as evidence that the field has begun to change. Interestingly the authors of the article claim that there is a correlation between research into gender inequities and work-place inequities within the field of archaeology itself. The idea that the field is sexist has, in their opinion, given rise to the increased interest and study into questions of gender.

Concerning methodology, and its relation to an “engendered archaeology,” the issue of gender as a social construct is put into perspective. According to the authors, gender has always been viewed as a social construct, though in varying degrees and depending on the given scholar. In their view, a gender-based archaeology would first and foremost seek to challenge any and all “starting assumptions” relating to the issue of gender in human history (Conkey 1997, 411). The issue of gender would be interpreted as it relates to <https://assignbuster.com/humanities-modern-movements/>

human-constructed reality and the material foundations of that same reality. By relating it to feminist thought, gender-based archaeology is able to show the areas where gender studies shed light: methodology, research, and intra-professional issues (hiring of archaeologists, male-female relations within departments, etc.). Most of all, they wish to show how a feminist archaeology might better approach “gender” than traditional archaeology.

A parallel movement has been feminism in general, one which is partially derived from the humanistic belief that all humans deserve freedom and dignity, women included. In both the Academy and general society, Feminism has ever sought to challenge the power centers and ingrained teaching of a male-dominated society. The modern State, while preaching a discourse of individual autonomy has at the same time criminalized the act of a woman selling her body for sex. This should in theory only concern her individual choice as to the use and disposition of her body and the subsequent decision to enter into a private contract (a term all too sanctified in capitalist society) with a customer of her choice. Despite that, the State has long claimed the power to supersede individual rights to enter freely into a contract, though only in certain cases and often for arbitrary reasons. The State, though nominally instituted to protect individual autonomy, exists as a nexus through which power is asserted. In modern society, political authority institutes a discursive relationship between the individual, that is the subject, and the edifice of power itself. ‘Power’ and the subject are necessarily inter-subjective and mutually dependent. ‘The identity of the subject is constituted only through its relationship to the power that denies it’ (Newman 2004, 143). Conversely, ‘power’ (i. e. the State) exists only insofar as it can exert itself over the subject. Because the State stands as the

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reflection of patriarchal interests and tendencies, in the case of prostitution it has sought to single out women. There is of course male prostitution, but women are usually more often arrested and prosecuted (Britton 2000, 60). In the case of prostitution, the autonomy of women, specifically with respect to sexuality, is severely hampered in direct proportion to the imposition and use of State power. The influence of patriarchal conceptions of the female body is evident not just in the laws instituted to 'combat' prostitution, but also in academic perceptions of women. 'Criminology remains one of the most masculinised of all social science fields...' (Britton 2000, 58). This affects governmental attitudes and perceptions of women and prostitution. By criminalizing prostitution, the State asserts its power and in doing so establishes its meaning as a social and political institution. The woman prostitute, as the subject, 'finds' and internalizes her identity as a criminal and as a subordinate of the overall male-dominated, that is patriarchal, power structure. The paradigm then is one of power subsuming the ability of the individual to express his/her autonomy.

Thus the 'freedom' so often valued and praised in democratic society has some obvious limitations. Feminism, in response to the global dissemination of capitalism and thus patriarchy, has sought to critique this power structure. The issue of prostitution has in large part served as a call-to-arms for feminists. It involves all the issues which they seek to combat and hopefully triumph over: the State, masculine power, control over the body, and inconsistent applications of individual rights and autonomy. For them, the power of the State has assumed an oppressive and unjust policy and systemic approach to female sexuality. The State values autonomy as long as it conforms to traditional notions of female propriety. This lies at the heart

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of what feminism sees as the edifice of male-dominated power and authority which has enacted laws to forcibly assert its conception of women.

Works Cited

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