

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: A FEMINIST/POSTMODERNIST UNDERSTANDING

INTRODUCTION

Most of us spend most of our days in organizations of some sort or another, a way of life that was unthinkable for most of our great-grandfathers, and much more so even for our grandmothers. But this progressive organizing of our lives and what it means has remained resolutely outside the purview of organizational theory. So even if we subscribe to Weber's analysis of the organization as an iron cage, or glimpse in ourselves the disciplinary consciousness of Foucault which gets us up every morning and off to work—rhythms that are no less surprising because they are still so recent—nonetheless we are left, at least in the mainstream of organizational literature, with little that attends to the perspectives of Weber and Foucault, and even less that attends to gender and power. It could be argued that women no longer experience male power only at home, by fathers, husbands, sons. Now, in an expression of that duality conveniently called public life, women experience male power at work—from private to public patriarchy, as it were. In my focus on newcomers to organizations, I maintain that "coming to know" cannot be separated from relations of power between women and men.

But most organizational literature is silent on that issue of women and men, power and knowledge, even the self-consciously left wing literature. What I wish to do in the development of this conceptual framework is to look first at how feminist theory has attempted to grapple with the liberal ideals which form the philosophical assumptions of most organizational theory, and secondly, I wish to address feminist theory in its analysis of Marxism which forms the basis of much of the left-wing organizational theory—a much slimmer body of work, particularly in North American literature. But in its self-conscious identification with the oppressed, the Marxian analysis cannot be overlooked. How well does either an individualist or a materialist analysis illuminate gender power

relations in our organizations? More precisely, can the abstract individual or class as analytical categories stand in for gender as a way of explicating the construction of relations of domination and subordination between women and men in our organizations? Feminist theorists argue that they cannot.

Finally, I wish to develop a more precise understanding of women, men, power and organizations through an analysis of feminist theory as it grapples with postmodernism and the privileging of discourse rather than reason or praxis, and the questions postmodernism raises about the intersections of power, knowledge and subjectivity. If language in the form of conflicting discourses marginalizes people—and my concern is how language marginalizes the less powerful in organizations, specifically women—how do feminist theorists, as they grapple with these questions raised by the postmodernists, help to illuminate this process of marginalization as we come to know the organization? My question might better be stated, then, as: How do women and men come to know these materially based relations of power and knowledge—these strategies of discourse—which are our organizations?

IMPLICATIONS FROM POLITICAL THEORY

What theories about human nature and the structuring of human relations are implicitly contained in political theory, as well as in theories about how we humans organize, for whatever purpose? "You do the cooking, honey, I'll pay the rent" are more than the lines of a well-known song: they contain an implicit comment on the appropriate structuring of human—male and female—relations, just as organizational theories do. In order to illuminate, then, how both women and men come to know the organizational reality that they create and recreate through organizational narrative or discourse, I will begin by assessing Alison Jagger's (1983) epistemological and ontological exploration of liberal and Marxist political theory and their conceptions of human nature in order to better understand the philosophical assumptions of organizational theory.

THE LIBERAL VIEWPOINT

As Jagger explains in her analysis of liberal and Marxist political philosophy and the links between their implicit or explicit conceptions of human nature, knowledge, epistemology and methodology, "every conception of human nature involves a characteristic conception of human knowledge—its sources, its extent and the proper criteria for distinguishing truth from falsity. . . . Commitment to a theory of human nature carries with it commitment to a certain epistemology . . . [which thus] involves at least an implicit commitment to a certain method for understanding social reality and to certain criteria of theoretical adequacy" (p. 355). Exploring the ramifications of this analysis, Jagger points out that liberal political theory relies on "a conception of human nature that is radically individualistic"; individuals are conceived as "essentially separate rational agents" (p. 355) who exercise freedom of choice (Amsden, 1980, p. 32). What separates us from other animals—what makes us human—is our ability to reason, our

use of language, our competitiveness, and our "tendency to put self over others" (Tong, 1989, p. 39). Liberal theory is characterized by hierarchical dualities: the mind is privileged over the body, transcendence over immanence, reason over emotion, culture over nature, man over woman (Tong, 1989, p. 131), the public world over the private, where a firm line is drawn between what is public, and therefore subject to political discourse, and what is private, which is not (p. 182)¹. Liberal epistemology, which originated with Descartes and culminated in the analytic tradition of the late 19th century, thus "views the attainment of knowledge as a project for each individual on her or his own. . . . the attainment of knowledge is conceived as essentially a solitary occupation that has no necessary social preconditions" (Jagger, 1983, p. 355). Only from above, in God-like transcendence and isolation, then, is it possible to know the world. To Jagger, this

empiricist strand in Cartesian epistemology culminated in the theory of knowledge known as positivism. According to positivism, the paradigm of knowledge is physical science and positivism has a distinctive view of what constitutes the scientific enterprise and the proper method of scientific discovery. One basic assumption of this view is that all knowledge is constructed by inference from immediate sensory experience. Thus knowledge, that is science, is atomistic in structure and the task of epistemology and the philosophy of science is to formulate the rules for making valid inferences from the basic sense experiences on which knowledge is thought to be founded. . . . The assumption that the forms of

¹And, as Tong points out, this strict division between the public and the private as to what may be discussed publicly, as it were, has implications for the maintenance of the status quo: "Liberal philosophy maintains the political status quo by drawing a firm line between the public and private realms. This boundary prevents comparisons and contrasts between the life of a family member and of a worker--the kind of ideation reflection that facilitates the development of revolutionary consciousness" (p. 182). Tong goes on to point out that this separate spheres model cannot illuminate women's lives because it cannot grapple with work in the home, so work in the home is deemed natural, private, and therefore unanalysable. (p. 182-183)

explanation appropriate for physics are the only forms appropriate for any explanation leads positivist epistemology to prefer quantificational or mathematical types of explanation. (p. 355)

In positivism, theoretical adequacy is achieved through objectivity and universalism. Objectivity is "the [scientific] inquiry's independence from the subjective values, interests and emotions of those who engage in scientific enquiry or who deal with its results"—the influence of the social realm. Universalism is achieved through intersubjective verification: that "everyone should emerge with the same scientific conclusions" (p. 355). In positivism, therefore, "the good scientist is the abstract individual of liberal political theory" (p. 355-356). In liberal political or moral philosophy objectivity is achieved "insofar as it introduces devices for eliminating the influence of special interests and values" (p. 377-8), for example, in the Archimedean point where the abstract individual stands outside society, detached and disinterested, or in the neo-positivism of John Rawls and his "veil of ignorance", where no one can know where his* interest lies. As Jagger notes, "The aim of these methodological constraints is ultimately the same, to provide justification for the claim that the theories produced by these methods are not biased in favor of any particular social group" (p. 377-8), thus leading to the ideal liberal state as "the impartial protector of the rights of all its citizens" (p. 182). And because they do not present the viewpoint of any particular group, they achieve the twin goals of universalism: "conclusions that are universally applicable and as embodying universal or human values" (p. 377-8).

THE MARXIST COUNTERPOINT

*I have used the pronoun "his" quite deliberately. I will argue later in this chapter that the construction of knowledge and the male subject who knows are inseparable in Enlightenment or modernist thought, which includes both liberalism and Marxism (cf. Hekman, 1990).

In its view of human nature, its political theory, and its conditions for theoretical adequacy, Marxism exists in counterpoint to liberalism. In liberal political theory the analytical category is the rational individual, radically separate from social relations, and in pursuit of both freedom and liberty, from which liberalism took its name. Knowledge is conceived as an individual project, and both objectivity and universalism are achieved through detachment from the social realm. In comparison, in Marxism the analytical category is class. What makes us human is not our capacity for rational thought but "that we produce our means of subsistence" and thereby, unlike the bees in Marx's famous example*, "we create ourselves in the process of intentionally, or consciously, transforming and manipulating nature". More succinctly, "we are what we are because of what we do" (Tong, 1989, p. 39). As Marx said, "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary, their social existence that determines their consciousness" (1983, Kamenka, p. 160), which is a major break "with the assumptions of liberalism . . . not just about political economy but about consciousness and language" (Weedon, 1987, p. 27). In Marxism, as Jagger explains, individuals exist

necessarily in dialectical interrelation with each other and with the non-human world. . . . The essential activity of human beings is praxis and the development of knowledge is just one element of praxis. . . . Knowledge is developed as part of

*In *The Politics of Reproduction* (1981), however, Mary O'Brien points out a serious lacuna in the example of the architect and the bee, and the link drawn between consciousness and intentionality, and what is work and therefore analysable, and what is not work and therefore unanalysable. To borrow her term, how is "reproducing Marxist man" to be understood? As she points out, "female reproductive consciousness knows that a child will be born, knows what a child is, and speculates in general terms about this child's potential. Yet mother and architect are quite different. The woman cannot realize her visions, cannot make them come true, by virtue of the reproductive labour in which she voluntarily engages, if at all. Unlike the architect, her will does not influence the shape of her product. Unlike the bee, she knows that her product, like herself, will have a history. Like the architect, she knows what she is doing; like the bee, she cannot help what she is doing" (p. 38).

human activity to satisfy human needs. Rather than viewing knowledge as the purely intellectual construct of a detached spectator, therefore, Marxism sees knowledge as emerging through practical human involvement in changing the world, an involvement which also changes human beings themselves. Moreover, since human productive activity always takes a definite historical form, all knowledge must be seen as growing out of a specific mode of production. (p. 358)

In liberalism, knowledge is value free, the achievement of the detached and rational individual who is neither the product of particular social relations nor the mouthpiece for any one group. It is unmarked by struggles over power because power is either irrelevant or dysfunctional—the truth frees us from power. In Marxism however, knowledge, or "the conceptual framework by which we make sense of ourselves and our world, is shaped and limited by the interests and values of the society that we inhabit [and is] historically determined by the prevailing mode of production" (p. 358). We develop our ideas within our "specific material circumstances", but our ideas are also shaped by our "experiences of those circumstances" (p. 207). It is knowledge that is achieved ineluctably within society, not detached from society, and in a class society therefore bound by class—there cannot be a viewpoint achieved outside class, there is no Archimedean standpoint, no veil of ignorance by which the individual removes himself from his social interests and thereby guarantees his objectivity.

In contrast to the liberal, positivist notion of knowledge as value free and universal, Marxists maintain that knowledge of the world is the knowledge of the ruling class, and while dominant, is partial and thus ideological. As Jagger explains,

societies have not been characterized by a single set of interests and values. . . . In such a situation, one cannot say that the prevailing world view or system of knowledge reflects the interests and values of society as a whole. . . . The system of knowledge that is generally accepted within a society reflects the interests of the dominant class. . . . In class societies, the prevailing world view supports the

interests of the ruling class by obscuring or by justifying the reality of domination. In this sense, Marxism views all existing claims to knowledge as 'ideological', that is, as distorted representations of reality. Only a classless society will produce an undistorted and genuinely scientific representation of reality. (p. 358-359)

This notion that knowledge is the representation of the dominant group's interest has ontological consequences, as Jagger points out. Knowledge, or reality, is perceived differently from the standpoint of the rulers compared to the standpoint of the ruled, or as Jagger stresses, "slaves perceive reality differently from their masters" (p. 359). However, as long as the system is stable, these views of reality by the ruled are prevented from gaining wide currency; and, in addition to control, "the plausibility of the dominant ideology is enhanced by the very structure of class society" (p. 359). False consciousness is the result.

This problem of relativity, unlike the universalism posited by liberal/positivist thought, is a central question for Marxist epistemology. Which group's version of reality is to be preferred, given the distorting nature of class society? In answer to that question, Jagger refers to the "totalism" of Georg Lukacs, who postulates that

we should prefer the standpoint of that class whose interests at a particular historical juncture most closely approximate to those of the totality of humankind. . . . Classes whose interest lies in perpetuating the existing social order have an interest in perpetuating the myths that justify their own domination. . . . Classes whose interest most closely approximates the interests of the social totality will have an interest in overthrowing the established order. Consequently, they are more likely to construct conceptual frameworks that will reveal accepted views as myths and provide a more reliable understanding of the world. (p. 362)

Jagger points out that Lukacs accepts the Marxist analysis of two opposed classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and "concludes that these two class positions provide the two major epistemological standpoints from which contemporary society may be

viewed": from the standpoint of the bourgeoisie life is heaven, from the standpoint of the proletariat, life is hell. She is also careful to point out, however, that

the workers' standpoint does not automatically provide them with a full, comprehensive and coherent alternative to the ruling ideology; they cannot help being influenced by the dominant world view. But the workers' position in class society forces them to take as problematic what the capitalist class takes as given, for instance, 'the quantification of object, their subordination to abstract mental categories'. According to Lukacs, the standpoint of the proletariat is epistemologically preferable to that of the bourgeoisie, because it drives the working class to demystify the myths of bourgeois society and to develop a new world view that will reveal more clearly the real regularities of social life and the underlying causes of those realities, including the causes of its own domination. (p. 363)

But Marxism, like liberalism, is bound by its analytical categories, its conception of human nature, and its conditions of theoretical adequacy. In liberalism the analytical category is the individual, in Marxism the analytical category is class. As a number of feminists have observed, class, with its emphasis on the public and economic nature of oppression, cannot deal either with why it is women who perform the marginalized economic roles in society or with the private and psychological nature of women's oppression. Heidi Hartmann has pointed out that class gives "no clues about why particular people fill particular places. They give no clues about why women are subordinate to men inside and outside the family and why it is not the other way around. Marxist categories, like capital itself, are sex blind. The categories of Marxism cannot tell us who will fill the empty places" (1981, p. 10-11)². Both liberalism and Marxism

²The vastly increased percentage of women who work outside the home for pay has not "fundamentally diminished men's power over women", the prescription of Engels which was to end women's oppression. "Through the sexual division of labour, patriarchy maintains the subordinate status of women both in the workplace and in the home. In a

obscure "important features of women's situation", features, Jagger argues, which are key to the least distorted conception of reality, a reality from which women are alienated (p. 379).

SOCIALIST FEMINISM AND THE FEMINIST STANDPOINT

Socialist feminism is an attempt to illuminate women's situation in contemporary society, an attempt that rejects the abstract individualism of liberal political theory, its epistemology and its methodology in favour of a theory of human nature that is "structurally identical with that of traditional Marxism and so, consequently, is the structure of its epistemology" (p. 369). However, it differs importantly from Marxism in that it assumes that the standpoint of women, rooted in the sexual division of labour—not the sex-blind category of class, an important distinction—and using a revised version of alienation, can reveal a less distorted reality unavailable from the perspective of class alone, and one that theoretically at least, is available to men as well. Iris Young points out that using the sexual division of labour rather than class as an analytical category is crucial, because

a class analysis calls for only the most abstract discussion of the respective roles of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, whereas a division of labour analysis requires a detailed, very concrete discussion of, for example, who gives the orders and who

workplace that is divided into high-paying, male-dominated jobs and low-paying, female-dominated jobs, men earn \$1.00 for every \$.64 women earn. In the home, working women, but not working men, experience the stresses and strains of the double day. Study after study shows that husbands of working women do not do much more work around the house than the husbands of stay-at-home housewives" (Tong, 1989, p. 181; also cf. Arlie Hochschild, 1988, *The Second Shift: Women and Their Double Day*). *The Globe and Mail* reported recently that in Canada "One study showed . . . that mothers who worked full time also performed 35 hours a week of household work, compared with 11 by fathers" and stated that "women these days frequently perform full days of paid work only to be confronted with a day's worth of unpaid work at the end" (p. A1-A2, June 19, 1992).

takes them, who does the stimulating work and who does the drudge work, who works the desirable shift and who works the undesirable shift, and who gets paid more and who gets paid less. Clearly, then, division of labor analysis can better explain why *women* usually take the orders, do the drudge work, work the undesirable shift, and get paid less, while *men* usually give the orders, do the stimulating work, work the desirable shift, and get paid more. (Tong, 1989, p. 183-4)

As Jagger points out, socialist feminists, like Marxists, "view knowledge as a social and practical construct and . . . believe that conceptual frameworks are shaped and limited by their social origins. They believe that, in any historical period, the prevailing world view will reflect the interests and values of the dominant class" (p. 371)—and that therefore a reliable world view is not available as long as the existing social order, based on the oppression of various groups, remains in place. Although a distorted reality is a given, however, a less partial and more comprehensive view of this distorted reality is available from the oppressed. Like Marxists, socialist feminists argue that the pain of the oppressed "provides them with a motivation for finding out what is wrong, for criticizing accepted interpretations of reality, and for developing new and less distorted ways of understanding the world" (p. 370). The oppressed class must look at the ruling class as well as itself in order to understand, and thus the standpoint of the oppressed is more comprehensive as well as more impartial because it "represents the interests of the totality in that historical period" (p. 371).

However, socialist feminists differ from Marxists in that they believe that for theory to be an adequate representation of even this distorted reality it must "represent the world from the standpoint of women", not the world from the standpoint of the proletariat. Jagger argues that because of women's particular condition in contemporary society—that "women suffer from a special form of exploitation and oppression"—women "have a distinctive epistemological standpoint", "a less biased and more

comprehensive view of reality than that provided either by established bourgeois science or by the male-dominated structure of everyday life" (p. 371). In reply to those who would argue that sex, unlike class, cannot provide an analytical category by which to understand the world, Jagger points out that the evidence for this

. . . is supported by a variety of arguments: by psychological research, which demonstrates that women's perceptions of reality are in fact different from those of men, by psychoanalytic theory . . . by investigations in the sociology of knowledge, which link the distinctive social experience of women with distinctively feminine ways of perceiving the world; and by feminist critiques of existing knowledge, which reveal how prevailing systems of conceptualization are biased because they invalidate women's interests and promote the interests and values of the men who created them. (p. 371)

Thus, drawing on the implications for women of the sexual division of labour, "socialist feminist epistemology claims that the social experience of women is so different from that of men that it shapes and limits their vision in substantially different ways—in other words, that women's position in society provides the basis for an autonomous epistemological standpoint" (p. 376). Jagger goes on to point out that therefore "the task for feminist scientists and political theorists is to build on women's experience and insights in order to develop a systematic account of the world, together with its potentialities for change, as it appears from the standpoint of women" (p. 376). By using a revised Marxist concept of alienation—we are oppressed because we are alienated not only from both our productive but from our reproductive work as well—from the standpoint of women we can discover what we are alienated from, thus bringing about a way of ending our oppression³.

³To Jagger, women are oppressed because we are alienated. This analysis differs from that of the liberal feminists, who "believe that women are oppressed insofar as they suffer unjust discrimination; traditional Marxists believe that women are oppressed in their exclusion from public production; radical feminists see women's oppression as

Socialist feminists agree with Marxists that "human beings express their humanness through their productive activity or work" (p. 208)⁴, but they extend that idea of work to include the work of reproduction, or as Jagger notes, "the production of people, including the production of sexuality, as well as the historically determined character of the production of goods and services" (p. 303). This productive activity, then, cannot only be seen in terms of class, but in terms of sex as well, as Jagger points out: "It perceives that human productive activity is organized invariably around a sexual division of labor, and that the specific historical form taken by the sexual division of labour has always been basic in determining the historically prevailing constitution of human nature" (p. 303). As women, then, we are alienated not only in terms of class, but as sexual beings, as mothers, and as intellectuals. Under capitalism, as Tong notes, "women's oppression takes the form of her alienation from everything and everyone, especially herself, that could be a source of integration for her" (p. 189). It is by using this revised form of alienation that we can recognize that our "contemporary oppression [is] a phenomenon peculiar to the capitalist form of male dominance. The apparent universality of women's subordination is revealed as taking a form that is historically specific. The framework of alienation moreover, links women's oppression in the home with women's and men's experience in wage labor" (Jagger, 1983, p. 317). Because

consisting primarily in the universal male control of women's sexual and procreative capacities; while socialist feminists characterize women's oppression in terms of a revised version of the Marxist theory of alienation" (p. 353)

⁴In Marxism, because work is seen as the "primary means by which we develop our capacities" as humans (p. 208), alienation and dehumanization are seen as the result of the "capitalist transformation of almost all human relationships into undisguised economic contracts" (p. 197). Because this dialectical relationship between who we are and what we do has been disrupted by the process of capitalism, workers are alienated both from other humans and from themselves. As Jagger notes, "capitalism prevents workers from engaging in the productive activity that is the mark of their humanity, or the activity of transforming nature not just in order to fulfill direct physical needs, as animals do, but for the sake of the full development of human potentialities" (p. 216). What was heretofore dialectical and interdependent becomes, under capitalism, "alien, separated from, or opposed" (p. 216).

alienation is rooted not only in the material but the psychological world, if we are to form an effective revolutionary strategy, it must include "techniques for demystifying the prevailing male dominant and capitalist ideology and for developing alternative forms of consciousness, that is alternative ways of perceiving reality and alternative attitudes toward it" (p. 333).

However, this standpoint of women cannot be discovered through naive unreflection because "women's perceptions of reality are distorted both by male-dominant ideology and by the male dominated structure of everyday life" (p. 371). Neither can it "be discovered through a survey of women's existing beliefs and attitudes"; instead it must be

. . . discovered through a collective process of political and scientific struggle. The distinctive experiences of women generates insights that are incompatible with men's interpretations of reality and these insights provide clues to how reality might be interpreted from the standpoint of women. The validity of these insights, however, must be tested in political struggle and developed into a systematic representation of reality that is not distorted in ways that promote the interests of men above those of women. (p. 371)

Furthermore, argues Jagger, these naive perceptions of reality are the result of what she terms the "mixed consciousness of the oppressed", or the split between their daily experience which "provides them with an immediate awareness of their own suffering" but which does not allow them to "perceive immediately the underlying causes of this suffering nor even necessarily perceive it as oppression. Their understanding is obscured both by the prevailing ideology and by the very structure of their lives" (p. 382). Thus the perspective which reveals "women's true interests" begins from women's descriptions of their lives but "goes beyond that experience theoretically and ultimately may require that women's experience be redescribed" (p. 384). This can only be achieved through struggle (p. 384).

Like Marxism, and unlike liberalism, socialist feminism achieves the conditions of theoretical adequacy of objectivity and impartiality by relying on the least distorted perception of reality, which is women's. As Jagger stresses, "the concept of women's standpoint presupposes that all knowledge reflects the interests and values of specific social groups". Therefore, "women's subordinate status means that, unlike men, women do not have an interest in mystifying reality and so are likely to develop a clearer and more trustworthy understanding of the world. A representation of reality from the standpoint of women is more objective and unbiased than the prevailing representations that reflect the standpoint of men" (p. 384). The standpoint of women is also more comprehensive: as the slave understands more of the world than the master, so does "women's social position [which] offers them access to aspects or areas of reality that are not easily accessible to men"—housework, rather than a labour of love, is work, childcare is not only a labour of love, it is work, part-time work is lack of opportunity rather than free choice (p. 384).

Finally, Jagger explores the problem of universalism as it is subsumed in the concept of women's standpoint: does this standpoint of women obscure or occlude in such a way that it contributes to other oppressions based on class or race or age? Just as the standpoint of women is theoretically available to men, it is available to all women through the process of continual struggle whereby some aspects of the social reality of women's lives assume greater importance at various times. To Jagger, "women's oppression is constantly changing in form and these forms cannot be ranked". Therefore "for each of these overlapping groups of women, some aspects of reality may be clearly visible and others may be blurred. A representation of reality from the standpoint of women must draw on the variety of all women's experience. In order to do this, a way must be found in which all groups of women can participate in building theory" (p. 386). To Jagger, this theoretical reconstruction of reality is

. . . an achievement linked inseparably with a transformation of power relations. . . .
In beginning the scientific reconstruction of the world from their own standpoint,
women must draw on the experiences of all women. As they do so, their
representation of reality will become increasingly adequate—and its adequacy will
be tested constantly by its usefulness in helping women to transform that reality. .
. . Women's standpoint offers a perspective on reality that is accessible in principle
to men as well as to women, although a materialist epistemology predicts that men
will find it more difficult than women to comprehend this perspective and that
widespread male acceptance of it will require political as well as theoretical
struggle. (p. 387)

For Jagger, the concept of women's standpoint rooted in the sexual division of labour
and using a revised version of alienation allows for a less distorted view of reality than
that available from other standpoints, and it therefore contributes to a more objective,
more comprehensive and less partial system of knowledge about the world. However,
although Jagger herself is careful to stress that this standpoint is not universal in that it
does not pretend that there are no differences between women, and that this standpoint
must reflect the shifting and diverse nature of women's lives, lives divided by race, by
class, by sexuality (p. 386-7), the whole notion of standpoint, of the privileging of any
theory of knowledge or epistemology, is under question. So too are the notions of a
fixed reality and a fixed subjectivity, upon which both the notions of standpoint and
alienation depend.

FEMINISM AND CRITICAL THEORY, MODERNISM AND THE POSTMODERNIST CRITIQUE

As Marx does to Hegel, postmodernism turns modernism on its head. Like the
wings of the owl of Minerva which spread only at the falling of dusk, it is the fullest

extension of modernism, incorporating its own critique, demanding its own self-analysis—the fulfillment of modernity, not a new world order. Unlike modernism, in postmodernism it is not whose reason, whose knowledge shall prevail, whose justificatory appeal shall stand, buttressed by calls to objectivity, impartiality, universality, but that no form of reasoning, no knowledge, no justificatory appeal can stand outside relations of power. In postmodernism, modernism as both liberalism and Marxist humanism, capitalist modernism and communist vanguardism (cf. Huysen, 1990), is criticized for its ideas of the fixed and unified nature of the self and of subjectivity, for its idea of a transcendent reason or a non-ideological position from which a fixed and uncontaminated reality can be known, for its transcendent criteria for truth and falsity, and most radically, for its reliance on epistemology itself, that any theory of knowledge can be privileged. The ideas which inform the Enlightenment become its undoing; in postmodernism, modernism's most "conspicuous features" are radicalized: evolutionism is dissolved, historical teleology disappears, the privileged position of the West evaporates, a "thorough-going constitutive reflexivity" is recognized (Giddens, 1990, p. 52), "functionalism and absolutism" is rejected in favour of a "non-dualistic, non-unitary approach to knowledge" (Hekman, 1990, p. 1). Ultimately, in postmodernism there are no truths, no justificatory strategies—however benevolent their intent—which may be justified outside relations of power, no position of transcendence, no holy war.

CRITICAL THEORY, MODERNISM, AND THE POSTMODERN CRITIQUE

During the 1970s, critical theory, or "the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age" as Marx put it, was dominated by Jurgen Habermas and his project, the recapturing of rationality and its emancipatory possibilities for Western thought (Fraser, 1987, p. 31). Andreas Huysen (1990) argues that this ultimately was a

German project, arising out of their own particular history, and maintains that this was well within the confines of modernism. Huysen argues instead for the "specifically American character of postmodernism. . . . For a variety of reasons, [postmodernism] would not have made any sense [in Europe]. West Germany was still busy rediscovering its own moderns who had been burnt and banned during the Third Reich" (1990, p. 243)⁵. By the 1980s, however, critical theory had shifted from a focus on "the immanent critique of capitalism" by the Frankfurt School, to a "totalizing critique" of the roots of Western civilization (Angus, 1990, p. 21) launched by postmodernists like Lyotard, Irigaray, Kristeva, Foucault and Derrida. This critique of the modern called into question the privileging of reason, of progress, of history as linear and evolutionary, of transcendental, unitary and absolute truth, of belief in the efficacy and coherence of the "grand narrative", of the possibility of knowledge standing outside relations of power, of the ordering of thought through the use of hierarchical dualities, of the transparency of language, the nature of the self and the revelation of reality—in short, of any fixed point from which truth or knowledge could be understood, defined or justified. It is a crisis of authority that calls into question everything necessary to preserve the internal coherence of modernism, every aspect of the structure necessary for modernism to stand.

⁵He goes on to point out that for Habermas among others, "It was a search for alternative cultural traditions within modernity and as such was directed against the politics of a depoliticized version of modernism, which had come to provide much needed cultural legitimation for the Adenauer restoration From the depths of barbarism and the rubble of its cities, West Germany was trying to reclaim a civilized modernity and to find a cultural identity tuned to international modernism which would make others forget Germany's past as predator and pariah of the modern world. Given this context, neither the variations on modernism of the 1950s nor the struggle of the 1960s for alternative democratic and socialist cultural traditions could have possibly been construed as postmodern" (Ibid).

POSTMODERNISM AND THE END TO THE PRIVILEGING OF REASON, PROGRESS, AND EPISTEMOLOGY OR THE 'GRAND NARRATIVE'

To Anthony Giddens postmodernism is rooted in the anti-Enlightenment critiques of Nietzsche and Heidegger, who criticize modernity by focusing on reason and its link to the idea of progress and evolutionary history: that we can "become more and more knowing about a world that is becoming clearer and clearer to us", and who "link with modernity the idea that 'history' can be identified as a progressive appropriation of the rational foundations of knowledge" (1990, p. 47). As Giddens points out in his exploration of the roots of modernity in Christianity and the Enlightenment, philosophers replaced "one type of certainty (divine law) . . . by another (the certainty of our senses, of empirical observation); divine providence . . . by providential progress" (p. 48)—God replaced by reason, and reason tied to progress and human happiness.

However, these neat replacements gave rise to problems of their own, problems which resisted the explanatory categories within modernity and which provided the basis for the postmodern critique. The postmodernists maintain that reason is a tautological category in modernity—how can we reason about reason? In postmodernism reason, like science or philosophy, and in particular epistemology, is no longer accorded a position of privilege, of transcendence, is no longer seen as the impartial arbiter of what is truth, no longer seen as an unimpeachable judge of what we can state is knowledge and what is not. Instead the very idea of reason or truth as transcendent or absolute—as outside relations of power—is under attack. The unitary and univocal position of the modern as embedded in reason is seen as a specific regime of power, which is ultimately unable to justify itself outside of the traditions of modernity. As Linda Nicholson points out, the privileging of epistemology, or the general principles of knowledge,

rests upon the modernist conception of a transcendent reason, a reason able to separate itself from the body and from historical time and place. Postmodernists

describe modern ideals of science, justice and art as merely modern ideals carrying with them specific political agendas and ultimately unable to legitimize themselves as universals. Thus, postmodernists urge us to recognize the highest ideals of modernity in the West as immanent to a specific historical time and geographical region and also associated with certain political baggage. (1990, p. 4)

As Gayatri Spivak stresses, reason is no longer the only way to truth; but more importantly, the idea of a unitary or singular truth grounded in the absolute is also under attack. The postmodernists, Spivak points out, have "subjected many of the comfortable assumptions about humanity, knowledge, rationality and progress to disturbing interrogation. But what's distinctive about this interrogation is that instead of using science and reason to get to a clearer truth, these writers have viewed the very idea of truth with extreme suspicion, something to be dismantled, deconstructed" (Spivak in Harasym, 1990, p. 18). Postmodernists deprivilege reason, but they also deprivilege the ideal of Western philosophy, that there can be absolute, unitary truth, that truth can have a foundation.

Thus, this totalizing critique of the bases of western civilization which postmodernism entails is not only anti-foundational and anti-evolutionary; it is also, and most radically, a critique of epistemology itself. As we lost our belief in reason and progress, so we have lost our belief in the "'grand narrative'—the overarching story by means of which we are placed in history as definite beings having a definite past and predictable future. The postmodern outlook sees a plurality of heterogeneous claims to knowledge, in which science does not have a privileged place" (Giddens, p. 2)⁶. Thus in

⁶Even in science, and particularly in the theory of evolution, what had been stated with certainty is no longer certain. In *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and The Nature of History* (1990), Stephen Jay Gould's analysis rests on the denial of evolutionary theory. Human beings--and everything else on this planet--are not here because of progress, we are here because of a lottery: chance, not evolution, defines us. The Burgess Shale, not far from Lake Louise, was first discovered with its inestimable horde of fossils around

postmodernism all these "tall stories" that we tell ourselves about "scientific rationality, the unification of knowledge, the emancipation of humanity"—all are subject to interrogation and deconstruction (Harasym, 1990, p. 18). Nothing is transcendent. Knowledge or truth is not revealed or discovered through the application of science or reason. It is relationally produced, and there can be no knowledge, no theory, which is innocent of political location.

THE NATURE OF THE SELF, OF EXPERIENCE AND REALITY, AND OF LANGUAGE

As Spivak explains, this rejection of the unitary and the univocal inherent in the postmodern critique means that the nature of the subject and of experience, its relationship to reality, and thus by extension how language is to be understood are all under question. In postmodernism, there is no such thing as an essential unity of the self called self-identity; the rational, knowing, conscious, unified self of modernism is deconstructed, taken apart to show its artificiality which attempts "to hide the contradictions at the heart of human existence" (Cooper & Burrell, 1988, p. 99). The Enlightenment tenet that we could know ourselves and know truth or reality through the application of reason—that we could know what we feel and that we could think our way through a situation—is under attack. As Spivak points out, since the Enlightenment it has been thought "possible to have a direct and unmediated knowledge of reality—the reality of nature, and the reality of our own nature. Progress meant that the application of reason, knowledge of reality, would lead to the conquest of natural and social evils and the emancipation of humanity. In Hegel's phrase, we would be more and more at home in the world" (Harasym, 1990, p. 21).

the turn of the century, but Gould argues that to understand what the rocks contained in anything other than evolutionary or Darwinian terms was unthinkable then.

In other words, modernism entailed a belief in both the transparency of self and of reality—given the right conditions, both were ultimately knowable, revealed through the transparency of language, and these revelations could be applied to the progressive freeing of the world from the ignorance which kept it in bondage. Our experience of the world was ultimately knowable; the link between knowledge and experience was unmediated. But in postmodernism the stability, the unity and ahistoricity of self, language and reality are all questioned; it is deemed impossible "that there is an essential unity of self through time and space termed self-identity and that there is an essential relationship between language and reality termed truth. The notion of a unified, or integrated self, is challenged by reference to the idea that the self is fundamentally split between its conscious and unconscious dimensions" (Tong, 1989, p. 219).

And just as there can be no fixed self, neither can there be a fixed reality which can be revealed by a transparent language. As Rosemary Tong points out, in postmodernism the notion of a fixed truth "is challenged by referring to the idea that language and reality are variable and shifting, missing each other in a Heraclitean flux. Words do not stand for things, for pieces of reality. Rather reality eludes language, and language refuses to be pinned down or limited by reality" (Ibid, p. 220). Thus, influenced by Wittgenstein and Nietzsche, the postmodernists have argued "that direct knowledge of our own nature is inconceivable. . . . All that we can know is what we say about the world—our talk, our sentences, our discourses, our texts" (Harasym, 1990, p. 21), a statement that leaves language clearly pre-eminent in postmodernist thought. Postmodernism, then, is not only about the dismantling of our beliefs in the virtues of rationality, of progress, of the ultimate transparency of our world and of ourselves achieved through knowledge acting as the handmaiden of progress. Postmodernism is as much about the dismantling of modernist ideas about language as they are related to these contested areas of subjectivity, knowledge or truth as it is about the privileging of language itself.

THE POSTMODERN RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF LANGUAGE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF: DERRIDA AND DECONSTRUCTIONISM, FOUCAULT AND POSTSTRUCTURALISM

The pre-eminence of language in postmodernism has wide-ranging ramifications for how subjectivity—who we are—is understood in the deconstructionism of Derrida and the poststructuralism of Foucault, two variants within postmodernism. As Cooper and Burrell (1988) remind us, the discourse of modernism "sees language as a means of expressing something other than itself. More specifically, it is a metadiscourse which legitimates itself by reference to some 'grand narrative'. . . . In the sense that it 'already knows', modernism is totalizing and controlling" (p. 94). However, the discourse of postmodernism depends not on unity but on difference, on language existing in a state of "irreducible indeterminacy . . . endless and unstoppable demurrage which postmodern thought explicitly places in the vanguard of its endeavours" (p. 98). In postmodernism language cannot refer to the meaning of something which is fixed and which therefore can be discovered or revealed through the transparency of its form; instead language is involved in an endless play of *differance*, a form of "self-reference in which terms contain their own opposites and thus refuse any singular grasp of their meanings" (p. 98).

It is within this larger understanding of language in postmodernism, therefore, that the self is either constructed as a position in language (Derrida), or is an effect of strategies of discourse or disciplinary practices (Foucault). In both the deconstructionism of Derrida and the poststructuralism of Foucault it is language or discourse which is pre-eminent, not the self; it is the relative interpretations of the world by an "observer-community", not absolute or universal knowledge constructed through the "self-elevated position of a narcissistic 'rationality'" (Cooper & Burrell, 1988, p. 94), which are of concern to the postmodernists.

In her explanation of how the dismantling of modernist conceptualizations of language affect how we understand the self and subjectivity, Chris Weedon (1987) points out that postmodernism draws on the "structural linguistics of de Saussure . . . Marxism, particularly Louis Althusser's theory of ideology⁷, and the psychoanalysis of Freud and Lacan" (p. 12). In Saussurean structuralism, language is a self-contained sign system governed by natural laws, an understanding of which Weedon maintains is "fundamental to all poststructuralism. It is Saussure's insistence on a pre-given fixed structuring of language, prior to its realization in speech or writing, which earns his linguistics the title 'structural'. . . . Each sign derives its meaning from its difference from all the other signs in the language chain" (p. 23). Each sign is itself composed of form, or signifier, and meaning, or signified, which are "so fused together that dividing them is impossible"; each pairing of form and meaning—each sign—is unique and invariable, and different from every other sign (Cameron, 1985, p. 139).

However, although poststructuralism "takes from Saussure the principle that meaning is produced within language rather than reflected by language, and that individual signs do not have intrinsic meaning but acquire meaning through the language chain and their difference within it from other signs" (Weedon, 1987, p. 23), it rejects "structuralist pretensions to scientific objectivity and comprehensiveness" (Baldick, 1990, p. 175). In particular it rejects "the existence of a decontextualized and fixed set of signs . . . with determinacy of form and meaning at its core" (Cameron, 1985, p.

⁷In contrast to Gramsci and Habermas, both of whom draw on the statement of Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* "that the ruling ideas of every epoch are those of the ruling class", (Weedon, p. 161), poststructuralism draws on Althusser, who rejects economism. Althusser maintains, instead, "that there is a strong relationship between ideology and politics on the one hand and the economy on the other, such that ideology and politics are a 'condition of existence' of the economy . . . ideology acts specifically as a condition of existence, which varies according to each mode of production" (p. 162). It "achieves its effect by placing and adapting people to their structural roles as 'bearers' of social relations. It does this by constituting individuals as particular types of subjects in a structure at the same time as it conceals from them their role as agents of that structure" (p. 163).

140); and it rejects the use of any binary oppositions—like those within the sign itself, and between signs—"as a principle of linguistic structure" (Cameron, 1985, p. 58). And in rejecting any fixed binary oppositions in favour of "a non-hierarchical or 'free play' of meanings" (Baldick, 1990, p. 176) the poststructuralists dispense with the self-present, all-knowing subject of the Enlightenment who speaks directly of an experience that can, at least theoretically, be fully understood by the subject. In particular the poststructuralists dispense with the idea that meaning or knowledge originates with the subject, that the subject can know, and that an object can be known. In short, the poststructuralists dispense with the subject/object duality which is the basis for the modernist understanding of how knowledge is acquired and who can acquire it. The rejection of these binary oppositions has far reaching consequences, which Allen and Young point out: "every form of subject-object epistemology, including the phenomenological distinction between the constituting subject and the experience it constitutes . . . objects, understood as entities existing apart from language, and consciousness, posited as the origin of meaning, and as that to which signs refer, [all] disappear" (1989, p. 5). By doing so, the poststructuralists maintain two things: that language "far from reflecting an already given social reality, constitutes social reality for us" and that since "meaning . . . is not fixed by the natural world . . . but socially produced within language, plural and subject to change", it cannot be "guaranteed by the subject which speaks it" (Weedon, p. 23). The subject can no longer know, rational man who has been the focus of modernist discourse; in postmodernism the focus now shifts dramatically to the discourse itself.

DERRIDA AND DECONSTRUCTIONISM

Jacques Derrida has criticized the metaphysical categories of dualism, phonocentrism, logocentrism, and phallogentrism implicit in the modernist conception

of language, which his theory of deconstruction as "the deconstitution of the founding concepts of the Western historical narrative" attempts to free us from (Harasym, 1990, p. 31). In this theory Derrida takes

a philosophically skeptical approach to the possibility of coherent meaning in language . . . [He] claims that the dominant Western tradition of thought has attempted to establish grounds of certainty and truth by repressing the limitless instability of language. This 'logocentric' tradition sought some absolute source or guarantee of meaning (a 'transcendental signified') which could centre or stabilize the uncertainties of signification, through a set of 'violent hierarchies' privileging a central term over a marginal one: nature over culture, male over female, and most importantly speech over writing. The 'phonocentric' suspicion of writing as a parasite upon the authenticity of speech is a crucial target of Derrida's subversive approach to Western philosophy, in which he inverts and dissolves conceptual hierarchies to show that the repressed or marginal term has always already contaminated the privileged or central term. (Baldick, 1990, p. 51)

Deconstructionism challenges the idea "that the 'true meaning' of any text can ever be arrived at"; instead no meaning "is counted more basic than any other, and there is no end to the process" (Cameron, 1985, p. 140). It also challenges the idea that meaning can reside outside language in some external reference point; language is not transparent, and it cannot reveal meaning, or "provide us with the meaning or essences of objects, concepts or persons somehow located outside of it. Rather language creates meaning, the only meaning to which it can refer. Because there is no being (presence) to be grasped, there is . . . no nothingness (absence) with which to contrast it" (Tong, 1989, p. 222). Freed from presence/absence, being/nothingness, or any of the other oppositional hierarchies which structure how we think, Derrida argues that "we would find ourselves free to think new and different thoughts" (p. 222). Only without the dualism of Enlightenment hierarchies which confine as they order, the logocentrism or

the "one best way", and the phallogocentrism, or the privileging of Western man, can we resist the imposition of order which imprisons us. As Allen and Young (1989) explain, this also erodes the modernist focus on the subject as all-knowing:

The notion of the subject as unity, a point of origin that knows itself immediately and wills its desires in the world, is understood by Derrida as the product of the metaphysical hierarchy that privileges presence. The metaphysics of presence seeks to collapse time into a series of nows and to deny linguistic spacing by imagining meaning as there all at once. Metaphysics preserves the priority of the subject by generating hierarchical dualisms in which the orderly and rational rule and expel the deviant, the disparate, and all that resists classification: subject/object, self/other, mind/body and identity/difference. Philosophical efforts to comprehend the whole in its unity undermine themselves by inevitably positing their own outside. The purity of any clearly defined category thereby depends on what it excludes, and the setting up of symmetries and complementary oppositions legislates an idealism that conceives the truth and being of things as lying outside time, space and history. (p. 7)

Thus free from the confinement and repression of oppositional dualities, the logocentrism and phallogocentrism which privilege the all-knowing, unified self, Western man who is the star of his own show, Derrida instead offers us the "concept of *differance* in which meaning is produced via the dual strategies of difference and deferral", where "the effect of representation, in which meaning is apparently fixed, is but a temporary retrospective fixing" (Weedon, p. 25), what Derrida terms the "play of *differance*". *Differance* combines "'difference' and 'deferral' to suggest the differential nature of meanings in language" where meaning is ceaselessly deferred or postponed; language becomes then "an endless chain or 'play of *differance*' which logocentric discourses try vainly to fix to some original or final term that can never be reached" (Baldick, 1990, p. 52). Rather than the repression that is inherent in the fixity of

necessary dualities, we have the freedom of play, where nothing can be finally irrevocably defined, including ourselves.

FOUCAULT, POSTSTRUCTURALISM, AND STRATEGIES OF DISCOURSE

Weedon argues, however, that Derridean deconstruction "does not spell out the social power relations within which texts are located", which has implications for understanding not only how the subject is constructed, but how power and knowledge are to be understood as well (1987, p. 25). Both Derrida and Foucault recognize that the subject is constructed as a position in language, reinforcing that language is both "the common factor in the analysis of social organization, social meanings, power and individual consciousness . . . the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested" and "the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed [which]. . . implies that it is not innate, not genetically determined, but socially produced" (Ibid, p. 21).

It is here, however, that Foucault's poststructuralism takes a different turn from deconstructionism. We are constructed not only in language, whereby both meaning and consciousness are always indeterminate, in the play of *differance*, but in strategies of discourse which position us at the same time as they produce our understanding of the world. Foucault's notion of discursive strategies or practices is rooted in his formulation that there can be no knowledge outside of relations of power, no place where we can step outside of our society "with its own particular mechanisms for producing truth" (Diamond & Quinby, 1989, p. x). Power is all-pervasive; what we call knowledge is not "the discovery of truth, i.e. the traditional dictum in science and philosophy", but "a net-like organization of practices and discourses that society ends up calling knowledge. . . . [which] is produced by heterogeneous practices of power (Calas & Smircich, 1991, p. 5). Our subjectivity cannot lie outside of this nexus of power and knowledge expressed in language; as Biddy Martin puts it, "Foucault insists that our subjectivity, our identity

and our sexuality are intimately linked; they do not exist outside of or prior to language or representation, but are actually brought into play by discursive strategies and representative practices" (1989, p. 9).

To Foucault, power is not removed by disinterring meaning from the inherent totalitarianism of Enlightenment dualities and rendering it free in the play of *differance*—Derrida's course. Instead Foucault insists that "'power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere'" (Woodhull, 1989, p. 168). It is "'not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous'" (Sawicki, 1989, p. 189). Power is not singular, a fixed entity, sovereign and located in one central point, as in the power of the state, where society is policed through prohibitions and thou shalt nots, where power is maintained through punishment. Instead power is disciplinary and capillary-like, seeping everywhere, widespread and diffuse, a network of representations and normalizing institutions which produce a self-policing subject in a "'society of normalization' . . . governed less by legal rights than by the authority of the human sciences" (Diamond & Quinby, 1989, p. 196), where our subjectification is our subjection (Hekman, 1990, p. 71). Thought and action, knowledge and administration, are knitted together in "the normalizing disciplines" of medicine, education and the sciences of 'man' which "not only articulated new forms of intellectual categorization and theories of experience and behaviour, but structured and were structured by new liberal humanist practices of bureaucratic administration, institutional medicine, schooling, work regulation and penal incarceration" (Allen & Young, 1989, p. 6). Schools and factories, prisons and hospitals all resemble each other, their administration as well as their function serving the same purpose, Bentham's Panopticon reincarnated in the supervisor's desk. As Sandra Bartky (1989) reiterates, the difference between the two ideas of power lies in the difference between punishment and discipline:

In older authoritarian systems, power was embodied in the person of the monarch and exercised upon a largely autonomous body of subjects. . . . Power in such a

system operated in a haphazard and discontinuous fashion; much in the social totality lay beyond its reach. . . . Modern society has seen the emergence of increasingly invasive apparatuses of power: these exercise a far more restrictive social and psychological control than was heretofore possible. . . . Power now seeks to transform the minds of the individual who might be tempted to resist it, not merely to punish or imprison their bodies" (p. 79).

Just as knowledge cannot be separated from power in Foucault's analysis, neither can the subject—the three are inseparable. To Foucault the subject is constructed as the effect of strategies of discourse, where power and knowledge intertwine to produce a disciplinary "regime of truth" focused on the body, "the site of domination through which docility is accomplished and subjectivity constituted" (Diamond & Quinby, 1989, p. xi), and in particular focused on our sexuality, shaped not through repression but through control. Foucault traces how "the idea of the subject . . . has been constructed within Enlightenment humanism, which took a self-reflective turn to construct 'man' as an 'object of knowledge'" (Allen & Young, 1989, p. 6). As an object of knowledge, 'man' was then uniquely susceptible to the disciplinary practices which emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and which were based on a new "cultural self-understanding" (p. 6). Discourses arising from the new disciplines of education, medicine and the sciences of 'man', Allen and Young point out, "structure a modern form of subjection through disciplinary practices that constitute persons as isolatable individuals who enact their own self-controlling order. Power, in this modern form, has a particular locus in the body, not primarily limiting or restraining bodies, but through microprocesses of social interchange that direct the body's energies toward production, including the production of power" (p. 6). Our sexuality, as inextricable from our subjectivity, is, in Foucault's analysis, immediately interesting: rather than understanding our sexuality as "a circumscribed domain fundamentally opposed to power and the law, we must see that "our sexuality has been forcibly articulated by power, not silenced";

our sexuality has been made the "truth of our being that knowledge must try to discover" (Woodhull, 1989, p. 168). The nexus of power and knowledge in which we are constructed does not deny, for example, our sexual expression, but creates "the forms that modern sexuality takes" (Sawicki, 1989, p. 182). Rather than suffering from repression, Foucault argues, we suffer from being classified recursively: "deviancy is controlled and norms are established through the very process of identifying deviant activity as such, then observing it, further classifying it, and monitoring and 'treating' it" (p. 182-183). As our sexuality is controlled rather than repressed, so are we disciplined rather than punished; our subjectivity—the "truth of ourselves"—becomes an effect of strategies of power and knowledge, the confessional linked to scientific discourse.

Thus Foucault is concerned not only with the play of meaning, where free from the repressive dualities of the Enlightenment we may contemplate the infinite possibilities of indeterminacy and thus free ourselves, but with why those particular meanings, and most particularly why we structure our thoughts in the way that we do, knowing that the way we formulate the question guarantees the answer. Why do we choose that particular way to think? To Foucault power precedes in its covert structuring of who we are and how we think, weaving and reweaving power, knowledge and the self ever more tightly together, strategies of discourse both the expression of the weave itself and the interweaving means.

Foucault's strategies of discourse, where power, knowledge and the self are intimately and inextricably linked in a dance of discipline rather than punishment, Derrida's deconstruction of the fixed and hierarchical dualities of the Enlightenment which hold us in bondage, the focus on the inconsistencies of supposedly coherent systems of thought, the denial of a fixed reality and the transparency of language which can reveal it, an end to the privileging of the all-knowing and unified self, of the accessibility of experience or of our sexuality as a source of truth, of progressive reason as embodied in the grand narrative: all of these are offered by the postmodernists as

strategies for liberation, as ways of ending the ordering of the self and the perceived world in confining, hierarchical dualities, as ways of examining the nexus between power, knowledge and the self in ways that modernism, with its unexamined metaphysical categories, cannot.

THE FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF POSTMODERNISM

However, how critical is the critical theory of the postmodernists—how ambivalent is the relationship of postmodernism to feminism? As feminists, how do we challenge oppression, how do we chart a course for change, without a coherent, unified position, a story that explains our past and tells us what to do in the future? How do we understand power that is everywhere and thus nowhere, power without an ontological status? How do we understand the "endless play of *differance*", and the indeterminate meaning and the indeterminate self, as other than liberal abstraction and the denial of the body rewritten in a new and more subversive discourse? In our haste to move beyond oppositional dualities, are we forgetting history, and confusing the physical with the metaphysical? In all this talk about space, where are women, women's voices, and women's defined bodies?

How, for example, do the postmodernists avoid charges of incoherence and relativity, charges which have political implications for groups like feminists wishing to establish truth claims in order to better their position? Will not this abandonment of coherence result in "an individualist politics" where political alliances are impossible, where allegiances based on generalizations are unsustainable (Nicholson, 1990, p. 6-7)? Do not the politics of interpretivism and its inherent relativity, or as Sandra Harding (1990) puts it, her majesty's loyal opposition, do nothing more than maintain Western

man as the star of his own show?⁸ Seyla Benhabib argues that when there is no criteria of validity, where everything is always relative, why will one particular set of discourses not continue to be privileged over another in actuality (Ibid, p. 7)? Is power rather than reason to be the last court of appeal? What are the political implications resulting from the postmodern denial of all boundaries, all fixed entities—including that of the body—inherent in the theory itself?

Susan Bordo (1990) contends that is not the invocation of endless difference a sophisticated rewrite of the abstraction of liberalism, where everywhere becomes nowhere, where the repressive mask of pluralism remains in place? And will not the erasure of the situated self, reflected in the postmodernists' "description of the body as fragmented, changing, and inviting a 'confusion of boundaries'" result in liberalism and the notion of the transcendent self simply rewritten, Cartesian transcendence replayed as disembodiment (Nicholson, p. 8)? In Rosemarie Tong's analysis, both postmodernism and liberalism share solipsism and skepticism, the result of their common "devaluation of bodily activities and functions", a devaluation which results in the abstract individual of liberalism or the incoherent self of postmodernism⁹ (1989, p. 35). The consequences of this devaluation, Bordo points out, are that "since we real human beings possess bodies

⁸Harding makes the point that interpretivism "discounts feminist knowledge claims in scientific and everyday contexts. It does so by taking the position that while feminists certainly have a right to their interpretation of who contributed what to the dawn of human history, or why rape occurs, or the causal role of family forms in historical change, that is just their opinion. The conflicting interpretations by nonfeminists are equally defensible. . . . They then go on to insist that since there is no way to decide 'objectively' between the two, there is no reason why people who are not already convinced of feminist claims should support them. This position functions to justify the silencing of women/feminists no less than its objectivist twin by refusing to recognize existing power relations of male dominance and the dynamics that insure intimate relations between partial and perverse beliefs and social power". (p. 88)

⁹As Tong explains, "political solipsism is the belief that the rational, autonomous person is essentially isolated, with needs and interests separate from, and even in opposition to, those of every other individual. Political skepticism is the belief that the fundamental questions of political philosophy--in what does human well-being and fulfillment consist, and what are the means to attain it--have no common answer" (Tong, 1989, p. 35).

of limited mobility and flexibility, to portray them as otherwise is ultimately to negate them" (Nicholson, p. 8). Whether we incorporate it into theory or not, the human body is situated in space—we don't dance in anyone else's body except our own. As Bordo stresses, "human understanding also possesses necessary boundaries and rigidities. . . . Reality may be relentlessly plural and heterogeneous, but human understanding and interest cannot be" (p. 8). We exist corporeally; we can not get away from who we are, our own perspective; our body limits us (Bordo, 1990, p. 140). Moreover, it was women in the liberation movements of the 1960s who first pointed out the political implications of position, who brought back to earth the category of 'human', gave him a pair of pants, and reminded him that he wasn't the only "player in town" (p. 137). It is easier, Bordo reminds us, to disregard the body when one has no experience of being defined as a body, but one that historically has not been the experience of women.

Whereas to Bordo postmodernism is another version of the liberal denial of the body, and just another way of eliminating a standpoint in order to reinscribe transcendence, to Naomi Schor (1989) postmodernism, like liberalism, is blind to history, blind because again like liberalism, it denies the reality of the body, underestimating "the full political weight of the categories . . . in its desire to get beyond the opposition male/female" (p. xviii). To deny sexuality and gender is to privilege those actually in power, which Schor argues both Barthes' erasure of sex and Foucault's desexualization do, and to subvert the liberatory possibilities of history. To pretend that we do not live in a culture structured by gender is to create further oppression, and to Schor we must remember our duty as historians and anthropologists before we set out for the promised land. We must hold open

for now a space that has only begun to be explored: the pitch black continent of what patriarchal culture has consistently connoted as feminine and hence depreciated. Before tearing down the cultural ghetto where the feminine has been confined and demeaned, we need to map its boundaries and excavate its

foundations in order to salvage the usable relics and refuse of patriarchy, for to do so is perhaps the only chance we have to construct a post-deconstructionist society which will not simply reduplicate our own. (p. 58)

We must be historians in order to be strategists, and strategists in order to be utopians: to Schor, "whether or not the 'feminine' is a male construct, a product of a phallogocentric culture destined to disappear, in the present order of things we cannot afford not to press its claims even as we dismantle the conceptual systems which support it" (p. 58).

Linda Singer's (1989) analysis of Foucault follows Schor's in that she concentrates on Foucault's curious and ultimately unsettling analysis of sexuality and power, one that remains confined by a subtext of woman as the object, man the teller, woman the silent one, startlingly reminiscent of Edward Said's (1978) analysis of Flaubert's equation of the Oriental woman with the Orient, and framed by assumptions of female passivity and male voyeurism. To Singer, "Foucault's failure to consider male dominance as one of the effects produced by the circulation of sexual discourse results in a series of strategic recommendations that circumvent the issues of greatest concern to feminists" (p. 138). Although she is careful to point out that "much of what Foucault writes is useful for developing liberatory strategies for addressing the political paradoxes that accompany the hegemony of sexual [discourse], we must also avoid identifying ourselves with what, in some sense, is yet another paternal discourse which claims pre-emptive entitlement to speak to and for women in their absence" (ibid). Thus, Singer points out, "Foucault's textual strategies often appear to be at odds with his stated purpose, recirculating the very forms of authority he aims to displace" (p. 147). Theoretically, to Foucault power is everywhere—there is no position outside of, or innocent of, power relations. His concern is not with power as a unitary concept, but with the "proliferative dimension of power, which operates through a network of variable and context specific social relations, each of which results in the creation of local authorities and points of resistance to them". There can be, then, no liberatory strategy, "no discourse which

cannot be contained by existing political deployments" (p. 141). But by denying women a voice, by speaking authoritatively for women, by evincing no awareness of specific differences, although Foucault claims to focus on differences rather than on the unitary, he reconstitutes "self-effacing masculinity as a unitary voice of authority" (p. 149). And, as Singer points out, if Foucault's concern is not with the unitary but rather the proliferative strategies of power, his lack of attention to differences and specificities would not seem to be consistent with his overall theoretical goals. If, in Foucault's terms, to attack the sovereignty of power is to decapitate the king, he often forgets that the king is a man (p. 148).

Thus, these theorists ask, lacking the strength of generalization, causality and order, unable to argue for the efficacy and coherence of the grand narrative or for progressive reason, will the deconstruction of oppositional categories, the denial of the universal, the denial of the body and the denial of the fixed and unified self lead to liberation—or merely reinscribe the status quo?

THE FEMINIST/POSTMODERNIST POSITION

In short, how helpful are the theories of postmodernism to feminism? A number of feminist theorists contend that postmodernism in its anti-Enlightenment critique frees feminist theory, not by denying or redefining epistemology and ontology, but by deconstructing and displacing them. In that deconstruction and displacement of epistemology and ontology doubt, skepticism, constant interrogation, the recognition of marginality and the silence of the other as well as the speech of the self is incorporated—and more than incorporated, demanded. Postmodernism is not a political movement, a grand narrative teleological in its intent of achieving social justice; it is corrective and critical, specific, contextual and historical—as we advocate our own position, we cannot forget our own position, our own privilege, in relation to others. Postmodernism forces us to recognize that we cannot fully know the world through the power of our reason, nor can we fully know ourselves. We must always ask, what has been left out? What can we not see, what have we forgotten, what have we never known and cannot know?

Gayatri Spivak, the translator of Derrida's *On Grammatology*, maintains that deconstructionism and feminism are more than compatible—they are a necessary strategic alliance, opening up feminism as a liberatory strategy at the same time as it forces feminism to confront its own metaphysical categories, its own unanalysed logocentrism and dualisms. Her concern lies with the totalitarianism of the fully coherent, the fully self-evident; thus to Spivak what postmodernism offers to feminists is the eternal vigilance of the critic focusing on the complicated shaping and reshaping of the nexus of power and knowledge. It does not allow for "fundamentalisms and totalitarianisms of any kind, however seemingly benevolent". It functions instead as a political safeguard, to remind us that "the worker" or "the woman" do not exist; "there are no literal referents". By itself, Spivak notes, postmodernism cannot found a political

program—its strength is that it is "a corrective and critical movement" (Harasym, 1990, p. 61-62). It is a strength that feminist theory cannot afford to forego as it attempts to construct a way of understanding the world that makes central the concerns of women.

Spivak disagrees with the arguments of those who maintain that if there is no room for the grand narrative, for a coherent account of the world which in its construction necessarily eliminates just as it includes, then there is also no room for understanding, for coherence, for causality in the service of reason in the construction of a way of understanding the world, and ultimately, of course, no place for a political platform based on the concerns of women. Spivak is quite careful to separate the idea of a grand narrative and all that it entails and exactly what postmodernism attacks or calls attention to. The easy opposition of absolute versus relative is irrelevant in postmodernism; what we search for is not the defining category of absolute versus relative truth, but the space of the spectrum. As she explains, a grand narrative "has an end in view. It is a programme which tells how social justice is to be achieved". Spivak does not demand that grand narratives be abandoned, only that theorists recognize that perfection is unattainable, and not just unattainable, unwanted. As she stresses, the postmodernists, rather than getting caught up in teleology, "imagine again and again that when a narrative is constructed, something is left out. . . . So I think what they are about is asking over and over again, What is it that is left out? Can we know what is left out" (p. 18)? The postmodernists are concerned not with the itinerary of retrieval, but "the itinerary of silencing", of those who have not spoken (p. 31). To Spivak, in it in these "moments of doubt that a poststructuralist finds moments of enablement. Since we are not looking for a perfect analysis, but we are looking for a mark of vulnerability which makes a great text not an authority generating a perfect narrative, but our own companion, as it were, so we share our own vulnerabilities with those texts and move. It seems to me that those are the places where we would begin to question" (p. 27).

Postmodernism does not demand the elimination of the construction of a coherent, causal account of the world; it instead calls attention to what is always left out, who is always silenced, to our own inextricable involvement in the production of that narrative, to our own vulnerability. Postmodernism sees all of these as moments of enablement, as places where we begin to question rather than as places where we begin to construct the perfect, the final, solution. We must recognize the limits of our constructions, recognize that "rather than establish the narratives as solutions for the future, for the arrival of social justice" we must work "within an understanding of what they cannot do, rather than declaring war" (p. 18-19). What postmodernism demands is not that we jettison any attempt to construct a coherent account of the world, but that we incorporate into our grand narratives, our explanations of the world, our causal judgement, the interrogative, so that statement and question, incorporation never possible, remain in constant tension. What we must remember is that we "dance critically on the edge of every narrative pointing out the silences, pointing out the unspoken, undescribed others that are implied in each of these narratives" (p. 19).

The postmodernists also remember that this construction of a grand narrative is literally that, an attempt at understanding; it is not an uncovering of reality, as Spivak stresses. Instead, the postmodernists "are interested in looking at the limits of narration [and recognizing that] the narrative takes on its own impetus as it were, so that one begins to see reality as non-narrated. One begins to say that it's not a narrative, it's the way things are" (p. 19). If we must always be skeptical, does that mean that we must throw away causal judgment, and with that political understanding? Spivak replies that skepticism does not imply that we cannot think causally. But it does imply first of all that we recognize that "one quite often substitutes an effect for a cause when one is thinking causally. That is a way of being aware that causal thinking has its own limits", and that "generally causes are produced as effects of effects" (p. 23). And secondly, we have to recognize that although "one can't judge without causal thinking" it does not

follow that we can then "ground the cause that one has established for the analysis into a certainty" (ibid). What we must remember is the state of incompleteness. What we must resist is closure, not coherence, causality or involvement, as she points out : "to an extent there's always that further question . . . one shouldn't want to close off that discussion, one should be able to say, 'Look, I'm putting my interests scrupulously on the table, that is what we can do at the moment, but there you are'" (p. 32).

The postmodern refusal of absolutism or universalism does not mean helpless relativity, in Spivak's eyes. It does not mean that everything—and therefore nothing—is considered, but that we must always keep in the forefront of our minds not the search for the universal answer, but that we are inextricably involved in the production of our own narrative, and that acknowledgement involves us in our own interrogation at the same time as we are involved in our own statements and explanations. To Spivak it means "not that you should consider all other subjects. I was saying that you might want to entertain the notion that you cannot consider all other subjects and that you should look at your own subjective investment in the narrative that is being produced" (p. 32). It means redrawing a circle so that an opening is always there for doubt, for skepticism, for a recognition of privilege. What have I been able to say because of my privilege that others have not been able to say? If we fix our glance at the uncertainty which is implicit in this practice we might be able to "look for a bit at what is being edited out, and then perhaps we shall be able to engage productively in what is called affirmative deconstruction, with what the nature of that uncertainty is" (p. 21).

As some have charged, does postmodernism demand that we dispense with rationality as inherently oppressive? To that question Spivak replies that it is not that the project of rationality is equivalent to oppression, but that nothing is immune from the searching glance which recognizes limits. To Spivak, the rationalist project has failed, not because it hasn't achieved self-understanding, but "because it has not acknowledged that self-understanding is impossible" (p. 30). However, if we agree that

self-understanding is impossible, then what? If we agree that we cannot reason our way into understanding through knowing ourselves, then what? To Spivak, we have to give up logocentrism, phallocentrism, give up the idea that we can be the hero who finds the global solution, no matter how perfect our reasons, no matter how enlightened the solution. As Spivak stresses, the postmodernists wish to investigate

the rationalist narratives of the knowing subject, full of a certain sort of benevolence towards others, wanting to welcome those others into his own—and I use the pronoun advisedly—into his own understanding of the world, so that they too can be liberated and begin to inhabit a world that is the best of both possible worlds. In the process, what happens is that such a world is defined, and the norm remains the benevolent originator of rationalist philosophy. . . . The hero of this scenario, of this narrative, has been in fact Western man. (p. 19-20)

In other words, this hero thinks that through the power of reason he can fully understand the world and himself—no part of the world or his involvement in it remains obscure due to the power of his reason, but at the same time he remains the centre of his own story, but blind to his position. Instead, we should "try to behave as if [we] are part of the margin. [We] should "try to unlearn [our] privilege"—whatever privilege we feel we have of class or race or gender or the infinite number of other privileges that confer on us the right to speak and on others, silence (p. 30).

These are all admissions of incompleteness, an admission of incompleteness which Spivak applies in a particular way to the construction of feminist theory. To Spivak, to combat the logocentrism which is inherent in the construction of a grand narrative which does not recognize incompleteness, which seeks, instead, closure—the fixity of absolute truth—what we must do is to unlearn "our privilege as our loss". Asked the question, "How is it possible to avoid a politics of representation, speaking for or on behalf of other women, retaining their specificity, their difference, while not giving up our own?" she answers that by "unlearning our privilege as our loss" we become aware of the

other; we become aware of the one who has been silenced as we speak. But she cautions that this is a difficult project: "It will not come through benevolence, it has to be charted out very carefully, step by step" (p. 9).

To charges that feminism is by its very nature essentialism, Spivak returns again to the tenets of deconstructionism, and stresses that by recognizing always the incompleteness of our argument, we can maintain feminism as a political strategy without making it inherently oppressive. To Spivak, we have

to take a stand against the discourses of essentialism, universalism . . . But strategically we cannot. Even as we talk about feminist practice . . . we are universalizing, not only generalizing, but universalizing. Since the moment of essentializing, universalizing, saying yes to the onto-phenomenological question is irreducible, let us at least situate it at the moment, let us be vigilant about our own practice and use it as much as we can rather than making the totally counterproductive gesture of repudiating it. (p. 11)

By itself, Spivak notes, postmodernism cannot found a political program—its strength is that it is "a corrective and critical movement" (p. 61-62), one that demands space for the silenced, one that deprivileges not only speech over writing, the phonocentrism which Derrida decried, but speech over silence. Like the tracks in the snow which obliterate what might have been to which Derrida has referred, Spivak returns us constantly to the silence that has not spoken, the silence which is obliterated by our words, the silence within which we must construct our own feminist narrative.

Like Spivak, Linda Probyn (1990) is concerned with voice and privilege—how may we speak without silencing the other? But if Spivak draws on Derrida and the deconstruction of Western metaphysics, in particular the binary polarities or "violent hierarchies" which imprison us, Probyn draws on Foucault and his notion of the hierarchical ordering of knowledge. She asks that if we do not draw on Habermas with his presumption of equality in speech, that measured conversational dance where first

one and then the other leads, where everyone hears the same beat, then on whom do we draw in our desire to create the conditions where everyone who speaks, is heard? How can we recast conversation, knowing that nothing is fixed, that the question is not 'how can I state so clearly that you understand completely what I mean', but rather how may I speak without silencing you? To Probyn the crucial question feminists face is how to deal with the combined politics of location and voice, which Spivak alludes to with her somewhat cryptic remark of "unlearning our privilege". How, "in creating our own centers and our own locals"—our own voice—do we remember and deal with the fact that in doing so, we "displace others into the peripheries of our making" (p. 176)? How may we speak, not only for ourselves but for others, without the site from which we speak a source of oppression?

To Probyn the question is can the subaltern speak, Gramsci's term for the subordinate with its colonial and military heritage, and from where? Or does this question fail to even render the investigator visible, and if remaining hidden, powerful? If the subaltern speaks, is this speech only to provide knowledge for the investigator, so the subaltern is visible, but powerless, as Said (1979) maintains? Can the colonizer ever hear? Can the subaltern speak in the language of the colonizer? Can the subaltern ever remake the language, or must it always remain a foreign tongue? Must the subject always be hailed, "interpellated" in Althusserian terms, or are meanings and subject positions much more fluid and thus never "completely guaranteed", to draw on Valerie Walkerdine's idea of the fluidity of discourse and the absence of any fixed position (p. 184)¹⁰? In taking that position, are we freed?

¹⁰As Probyn notes, "Against the poststructuralist assertion that we are 'always-already positioned', Walkerdine wants to introduce a more fluid model of subject formation. In thinking about how we are positioned by gender, class and race, she questions the ways in which (subculture) researchers tend to take 'discourse at face value'. We can no longer take the meanings of discourses for granted and must turn to the ways in which individuals may be differently positioned by them. Gendered practices (within the home, at school, the use of media, and so forth) can therefore not be read off the surface;

To Probyn, the answer to Spivak's question—can the subaltern speak?—rests on the answer to another, more basic question, one which focuses on the constitution of "the epistemological constitution of knowledge, the ontology of the questioning subject, and the conjunctural question of where and how we may speak" (p. 177). This question is best answered in the early work of Foucault, where "the historical construction of knowledge" is revealed (p. 184), and where it is pointed out that knowledge is fixed in relation to the other, the lesser, where the other is occluded. Probyn describes this as a process of ordering, where "through a process of location, of fixing statements in relation to other established statements . . . knowledge has come to be ordered. It is through this process that the knowledges produced in locales are denigrated as local, subaltern and other. Foucault's complex model of power suggests that these subaltern knowledges are not directly oppressed but are merely occluded; they are not brought to light and silently circulate as women's intuition, ritual, and even, instinct. Thus, these experiences are rendered outside of the 'true' and the 'scientific'" (p. 185). How then can we bring to light "the submerged conditions that silence others and the other of ourselves" (Ibid)? To Probyn "the subaltern's situation is not that of the exotic to be saved. Rather her position is 'naturalized' and reinscribed over and over again through the practices of locale and location. In order for her to ask questions, the ground

their meanings to individual women and possible political articulations are never completely guaranteed" (p. 181). Probyn further explains that to be interpellated does not necessarily indicate any form of fixed position by referring to women and the family, seen by many feminists as both a source of oppression and a source of pleasure: "In recognizing a locale we see both the regulation of practices and why these practices in themselves might also be the source of mixed pleasures. This model does not seek to reify those practices; on the contrary in Walkerdine's formulation, it is to question 'how we struggle to become subjects and how we resist provided subjectivities in relation to the regulative power of modern social apparatuses'. This is also to remember that we negotiate our locales and that we are continuously working to make sense of and articulate both place and event. Moreover, as we approach others' locale we must keep in mind that women are never simply fixed within locale. We may live within patriarchy but at different levels, and in different ways the struggle to rearticulate locale continues" (p. 182). Thus we must "temper a vision of strict interpellation with the recognition that discourses are negotiated" (p. 182).

constructed by these practices must be rearranged" (p. 186). How do we do that? To Probyn, we begin at the end point, and ask ourselves what has been disqualified as knowledge, what has never been spoken, how do we deconstruct the closed meanings to make way for what we know?¹¹ It is then that the subaltern can speak.

If Probyn is concerned with opening up a place for the subaltern to speak by reinscribing what we know as knowledge, by peeling away what is considered to be the truth to reveal the supports that require the hidden and the silent, Chris Weedon is concerned with how gender power relations*, where women's interests are subordinate to those of men, "are constituted, reproduced and contested" through postmodern understandings of language (1987, p. vii). These gender power relations take the forms of "the sexual division of labour and the social organization of procreation to the

¹¹As Probyn explains, "the local exists nowhere in a pure state. The local is only a fragmented set of possibilities that can be articulated into a momentary politics of time and place. Against the postmodernist gesture of local, feminism can render the local into something workable, somewhere to be worked upon. This is to take the local not as the end point, but as the start. This is not to idealize the local as the real, but to look at the ways in which injustices are naturalized in the name of the immediate. In conceiving of the local as a nodal point, we can begin to deconstruct its movements and its meanings. Thus, in thinking of how locale is inscribed on our bodies, in our homes, and on the streets, we can begin to loosen its ideological effects. . . . In looking at how location disqualifies certain experiences, we begin to realize that the knowledge of locale is important and powerful" (p. 187).

*As Weedon explains, "As feminists we take as our starting point the patriarchal structure of society. The term 'patriarchal' refers to power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men. . . . Patriarchal power rests on the social meanings given to biological sexual difference. In patriarchal discourse the nature and social role of women are defined in relation to a norm which is male. Behind the general unwillingness, except among feminists, to rethink the sexual division of labour and its implications for the equality of women and men lies a fundamental patriarchal assumption that women's biological difference from men fits them for different social tasks" (p. 2). Weedon goes on to point out that "To say that patriarchal relations are structural is to suggest that they exist in the institutions and social practices of our society and cannot be explained by the intentions, good or bad, of individual women or men. This is not to deny that individual women and men are often the agents of oppression but to suggest that we need a theory which can explain how and why people oppress each other, a theory of subjectivity, of conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions, which can account for the relationship between the individual and the social" (p. 3).

internalized norms of femininity by which we live" (p. 2), forms which are rooted materially, and expressed in language. As Weedon puts it, "How women understand the sexual division of labour, for example, whether in the home or in paid work, is crucial to its maintenance or transformation. Discourses of femininity and masculinity bear centrally on this understanding and it is in this sense that language in the form of various discourses is . . . the place in which we represent to ourselves our 'lived relation' to our material conditions of existence". And these representations are mediated by power, as she goes on to state: "How we live our lives as conscious thinking subjects, and how we give meaning to the material social relations under which we live and which structure our everyday lives, depends on the range and social power of existing discourses, our access to them and the political strength of the interests which they represent" (p. 26). But she goes on to stress that although poststructuralism recognizes the "material nature of ideology, or in poststructuralist terms, discourse, the importance of economic relations of production, [and] the class structure of society", that does not mean

that discourses and the forms of social power which they legitimize are necessarily ultimately reducible to the capital-labour relationship, even in the last instance. In any particular historically specific analysis, this may indeed be the case. There is, however, space within this poststructuralism for other forms of power relations, such as gender and race, which must not necessarily be subordinated to class analysis, although questions of class and the interrelation of forms of oppression will often be crucial to the analysis. Like Althusserian Marxism, feminist poststructuralism makes the primary assumption that it is language which enables us to think, speak and give meaning to the world around us. Meaning and consciousness do not exist outside language. Stated in this way, poststructuralist theory may seem to resemble a range of humanist discourse which take consciousness and language as the fundamental human attributes. Yet in all poststructuralist discourse, subjectivity and rational consciousness are themselves

put into question. We are neither the authors of the ways in which we understand our lives, nor are we unified rational beings. For feminist poststructuralism, it is language in the form of conflicting discourses which constitutes us as conscious thinking subjects and enables us to give meaning to the world and to act to transform it. (p. 31-32)

What poststructuralism does incorporate into its theory is not vulgar economic determinism, then, but an understanding of history and change, and ultimately of hope: by focusing on language and its relationship to power, poststructuralism offers "a way of conceptualizing the relationship between language, social institutions and individual consciousness which focuses on how power is exercised, and on the possibilities of change" (p. 19).

Weedon herself draws on Foucault and his understanding of how meaning is created, rather than Derrida and his theory of deconstruction, which "looks to the relationship between different texts" (p. 22), but does not address the "power relations of everyday life" (p. 25) in which these texts are located. To Weedon, Foucault, with his emphasis on the historical construction of knowledge, provides a way to understand power at the same time it provides a place for women to speak. As Weedon stresses, Foucauldian theory "looks to historically specific discursive relations and social practices. . . . In this theory the meaning of gender [for example] is both socially produced and variable between different forms of discourse" (p. 22). Meaning, then, is constituted within language, is historically specific, and is contested, as Weedon notes: "We need to view language as a system always existing in historically specific discourses. Once language is understood in terms of competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning to the world, which imply differences in the organization of social power, then language becomes an important site of political struggle" (Weedon, p. 24).

In developing a feminist poststructuralist critique of social relations Weedon ultimately moves toward a very different conceptualization of the subject and of

experience along with a rejection of any standpoint, or privilege, from which reality is to be defined (cf. de Laurentis, 1989). As Weedon points out, poststructuralism is an epistemology that sublates ontology, the humanist conception of the subject decentered, and neither the Archimedean standpoint of liberal political theory nor the socially embedded standpoint of the Marxists is relevant. Discourse as the site of political struggle is where meaning and subjectivity are constructed, but neither are fixed. Meaning is constantly deferred and subjectivity is neither unified nor fixed—it is socially produced, and remains relational, socially specific, and historical. The unified subject of both liberal and Marxist humanism—the point from which we understand the world—does not exist. Instead, it is the "site of disunity and conflict" (p. 173). As Weedon explains:

For a theoretical perspective to be politically useful to feminists, it should be able to recognize the importance of the subjective in constituting the meaning of women's lived reality. It should not deny subjective experience, since the ways in which people make sense of their lives is a necessary starting point for understanding how power relations structure society. Theory must be able to address women's experience by showing where it comes from and how it relates to material social practices and the power relations which structure them. It must be able to recognize and account for competing subjective realities and demonstrate the social interests on behalf of which they work. This involves understanding how particular social structures and processes create the conditions of existence which are at one and the same time both material and discursive. In this process new modes of subjectivity become available, offering the individual both a perspective and a choice, and opening up the possibility of political change. Yet theory must also be able to account for resistance to change. This requires a theory which can encompass differences in subjectivity and different degrees of coherence between subject positions, from, for example, institutional attempt to impose and monitor

an all encompassing perspective, as in Catholicism, to subjectivity as the unsystematized accumulation of 'common sense' knowledge. (p. 9)

To Weedon, "subjectivity is of key importance in the social processes and practices through which forms of class, race and gender power are exercised" (p. 173); poststructuralism, by positing a non-essential subject, offers feminism a way of dealing with the myriad discourses of power that modernism, with its essentialist subject, cannot.

If subjectivity is constructed, then how is experience to be understood, in the same way as subjectivity, as temporarily fixed, and mediated by power? We cannot deny the importance of people's experience, "since the way people make sense of their lives is a necessary starting point for understanding how power relations structure society" (Weedon, p. 8). However, within poststructuralism, unlike socialist feminism for example, experience is also understood as only temporarily fixed. It is not "the source of true knowledge", a belief that rests "on the liberal-humanist assumption that subjectivity is the coherent, authentic source of the interpretation of the meaning of reality" (p. 8), an assumption which forms the basis for the feminist standpoint. Weedon argues that experience is socially constituted; it

has no inherent essential meaning. It may be given meaning in language through a range of discursive systems of meaning, which are often contradictory and constitute conflicting versions of social reality, which in turn serve conflicting interests. This range of discourses and their material supports in social institutions and practices is integral to the maintenance and contestation of forms of social power, since social reality has no meaning except in language. (p. 34)

This emphasis on deferred meaning and on socially constructed subjectivity and experience is crucial to understanding poststructuralism, the intersection of language and power, and how forms of domination and subordination are embedded in social relations. It is an emphasis which is also crucial for feminists, because, as Weedon points

out, "the existence of patriarchal structures requires a theory which can explain how and why people oppress each other, a theory of subjectivity, of conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions, which can account for the relationship between the individual and the social" (p. 40), which can recognize change in social relations, and which does not posit timeless, ahistorical oppression. In poststructuralism a focus on language, power, deferred meaning and decentered subjectivity intersect to produce a theory helpful to the feminist project of understanding gender power relations and formulating strategies for resistance and change.

Weedon is most concerned with how gender power relations are constituted in discourse: she focuses on postmodernism more for its impact on our conceptualization of language and hence on our subjectivity than for its impact on our understanding of the intimate links between who we are and how we come to know. But Susan Hekman (1990) argues that it is there where the most radical implications of postmodernism lie: that when we deconstruct knowledge, we deconstruct gender and the gendered subject, that we can't let loose the moorings of one without letting loose the moorings of the other. Absolute and unitary knowledge and the essentialism of the male subject who knows are inextricably bound, and to deconstruct one as the effect of oppositional dualities is to deconstruct the other as well.

In his deconstitution of the founding myths of Western thought, Derrida employs both logocentrism and phallogentrism; he deconstructs and displaces not only the dualism of how we come to know, the subject/object opposition which structures our search for absolute truth or knowledge, but he also deconstructs the dualism which informs all the other dualisms—the opposition of male to female and its extension to rational man versus irrational woman, the [male] subject who can know and the [female] object which can be only be known¹². Hekman argues that the absolutism of

¹²To Hekman, "the Enlightenment defined 'epistemology' as the study of knowledge acquisition that was accomplished through the opposition of a knowing subject and a

foundational truth and the essentialism of the [male] subject are obverse sides of the same coin: both are the result of the dualities which underlie Enlightenment thought. To "displace the rational/irrational dichotomy" of modernism means losing not only "the search for the one, correct path to truth", but also "the gendered connotation of certain ways of knowing" (p. 39). It is not only logocentrism which Derrida deconstructs, knowledge unitary, absolute, foundational, but phallogentrism. The subject who knows who can only be male, the underpinning of Western metaphysics, is deconstructed in this move, *differance* applied to both what we call knowledge, and to what we call, using those familiar oppositional terms, the sex and gender of the subject. If meaning, or truth, or knowledge resides in the play of *differance*, in a constant state of deferral, never fixed except in a temporary retrospective fixing, always multiple, so does the meaning of the sexed and gendered subject.

Hekman argues that both feminists and postmodernists maintain that we need a different way of describing how we humans acquire knowledge; both attack how the acquisition of knowledge has been understood. In the modern age reason was used "to establish absolute and universal truth" by the subject who was "the self-conscious guarantor of all knowledge" (p. 63). But the postmodernists attack these modern ideals of absolute knowledge and the all-knowing, self-present subject. To them, "knowledge is not acquired through the abstraction of an autonomous subject from a separate object"; rather, "knowledge, along with subjects and objects is constituted collectively through forms of discourse" (p. 63). To the postmodernists, all knowledge is hermeneutic (p. 135); thus the absolute/relative dualism which serves as the basis for the justification of knowledge in the Enlightenment is irrelevant when the ideal of absolutism, the notion that truth can be grounded, is itself displaced. Truth is multiple, hermeneutic and

known object Feminists reject the opposition of subject and object because inherent in their opposition is the assumption that only man can be subjects, and hence knowers Postmodernists reject the oppositions because it misrepresents the ways in which discourse constitutes what we call knowledge" (p. 9).

constituted in discourse; it is not singular nor unitary nor foundational, and with that move none of the charges of absolutism, relativism or nihilism are relevant, because these are notions which depend on the idea of foundational truth.

If there is no absolute truth, an effect of opposing the subject to the object, the knower to the known, neither can any of the other opposing dualities which structure the subject stand: the fully constituting subject as opposed to the fully constituted subject, active as opposed to passive, essential man as opposed to essential woman, biological sex as opposed to socially constructed gender. In her explanation of why women cannot be the subject in Enlightenment thought, why the subject and essential man are inextricably bound, Hekman points out the links between the desire to determine the essential nature of woman and the desire for absolute truth. She maintains that a goal of Western philosophy has been "to define the essential nature of women and thereby to determine her proper social role. This effort is an outgrowth of the foundational, existentialist impulse that has characterized Western philosophy since its inception. The effort to definitively identify women's true nature is part of the desire to ground knowledge, and hence social life, in the absolute and indubitable" (p. 135-6). Furthermore, nature is linked to women, and opposed to culture and men; irrational woman is opposed to rational man. Thus in Enlightenment epistemology the male subject as knower, the "rational man" who knows, are inseparable; if the internal coherence of Enlightenment thought is to be maintained, woman is always object, man is always subject.

To Hekman, the impact of postmodernist thought means that to redefine the masculinist subject of the Enlightenment to include the woman who knows would be to retain the prison of the Enlightenment dualities which inherently define woman not only as the Other, but the lessor; its internal coherence, as Jane Flax (1990a, b) has pointed out, depends on our exclusion. We are the necessary Other which provides stability to the whole edifice of the self-constituting Cartesian subject who is what we are not.

Neither can we revalorize "women's ways of knowing", because in doing so we construct another essentialist position which merely privileges the woman as opposed to the man, but does nothing to dismantle the prison which we both inhabit. It only changes our rooms.

Moreover, to continue to think in oppositional terms of sex and gender¹³ is to maintain these same dualities, to replicate the opposition of the subject and the object, the knower and the known, to maintain the links between absolute knowledge and the essentialist subject who is male. Hekman contends that freed from these dualities, these fixed links, we would think of ourselves in new and different ways: "We don't have to think in terms of sex or gender, biology or social construction. Rather, we can think in terms of biological sex as something that we understand through social categories . . . Biological sex and socially constructed gender are not separate or opposed, but rather form an integral part of what we are as individuals. . . . We are of course, sexed beings, but that biological fact is always understood socially and culturally. It can be understood in no other way" (p. 142). We need to think in terms of the non-oppositional and the non-hierarchical, we need to formulate "a discourse that articulates women and sexuality in radically different terms" (p.150) if we are to displace, rather than merely redefine, the epistemology of the Enlightenment. We need to "displace the active/passive dichotomy that informs the modernist distinction between the constituted and constituting subject" with "a subject that is both constituted and capable of resistance,

¹³In a fascinating book, *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (1992) Marjorie Garber takes apart our commonly held notion that even if we can accept the notion that gender is socially constructed, that our biological sex is certainly fixed. Garber argues that biological sex is no more fixed than gender; it is the reality under which we live which has force, not the one "revealed by anatomical inspection after death" (p. 204). To Garber, "one of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way in which it offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of 'female' or 'male', whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or constructed. The current popularity of cross-dressing . . . represents . . . an undertheorized recognition of the necessary critique of binary thinking" (p. 10).

linguistically constructed yet revolutionary" (p. 93). Following Irigaray, for example, we could favour an "epistemology that is pluralistic rather than hierarchical, where there is neither subject nor object, where "'oneness' would not be privileged", an epistemology which "rejects the masculinist definition of the subject that is unitary and rooted in a hierarchical dichotomy" (p. 83).

Hekman argues forcefully that deconstructing Enlightenment epistemology which opposes the subject who knows to the object to be known, displacing that oppositional duality in Derridean terms, means of necessity deconstructing the basic dualism which informs all Enlightenment thought: the opposition of male to female. With that move, it is not only knowledge and the acquisition of knowledge which must be understood in an entirely different way, but the subject, to Hekman a far more radical move. We can no longer think in terms of dualities, of the male subject as opposed to the female object, of either the self-constituting Cartesian subject as opposed to the fully constituted subject, nor even of sex as opposed to gender. Instead of sexual difference, and the male/female opposition which underlies that, we need to think in terms of *differance*, of ourselves as sexed and gendered beings who exist within discourse. *Differance* and discourse do not deny the body; they do create a space for rethinking who we are, and what we think we can know.

Thus to Hekman feminism forces postmodernism to confront its radicalism directly, to remind postmodernism that its attack on Enlightenment epistemology is an attack on the male privilege inherent in Enlightenment dualities; postmodernism in turn reminds feminism that women are made, not born. Our strategy lies not in redefining the subject to include women, to Lyotard "the last ruse", nor in revalorization of the irrational or the intuitive or the emotional over the rational, but in displacement, in constructing allegiances, not in establishing essentialist positions. Resistance, and the power to resist, resides neither in addition nor valorization, but in the dismantling of the whole

conceptual framework that consigned, and consigns us still, to that which cannot know, always object, never subject.

FINAL COUNTERPOINT

Spivak and Hekman, Probyn and Weedon muster very powerful arguments for the advantages of postmodernism to feminism. Freed from the confining dualities, the "violent hierarchies", of Enlightenment thought, we would be free to listen to the silence, both to our own undiscovered silence and to the silence of those who cannot speak while we speak, to attend scrupulously to that silence while we construct our own narrative for change. Freed from the opposition of relative to absolute, we could leave room for incompleteness, for uncertainty, in the construction of our own narrative; we could eschew the totalitarianism of the fully coherent, the fully self-evident. Freed from either the fully constituting or the fully constituted self, we could eschew the subject who knows the known in no other way for the subject who is not one, for the known to be known in more than one way.

We would not merely rescript the movie with a heroine rather than a hero. The whole idea of the benevolent intent of the hero or the heroine telling his or her story as the truth is questioned in postmodernism; feminism, following Spivak and Hekman's use of deconstructionism, would not wish either to redefine or to replace one metanarrative with another, the rationalist all-knowing hero who speaks for others with the rationalist—or for that matter the intuitive—all-knowing heroine who speaks for others. Feminism/postmodernism calls into question the idea of metanarrative itself, the idea of the rationalist, essentialist, all-knowing subject, the idea of benevolent intent. Instead of unity, fixity, closure, completeness, the stability of the fixed and oppositional dualities of the Enlightenment, feminism/postmodernism advocates constant interrogation,

skepticism, scrupulous attention to our own involvement in the construction of our own narrative, flux and ferment.

Foucault's notion that power and knowledge are embedded in discourse, that in discourse knowledge is created and power displayed, that in discourse who we are and what we can know are created, frees us, just as Derrida's deconstruction of Western metaphysics frees us by displacing the violent hierarchies which structure it. If what we know and who we are is not fixed, unitary, innate, if the real does not exist to be discovered by the essential subject who can only be male, then we can escape the defining category, the words which imprison, the locale which is occluded, whether we understand meaning in Derridean terms as only a temporary retrospective fixing or meaning in Foucauldian terms as an effect of heterogeneous practices of knowledge and power.

But feminists remain skeptical, most particularly about the postmodern privileging of language, and how that might affect how we understand our subjectivity—and within that, how we might forge political allegiances for change. As Hekman has written, we need a strong theory because our project as feminists is explicitly political. Can the intersection of postmodernism and feminism be helpful to that end? More helpful, for example, than the categories of the rational individual and class have been?

Much of the discussion by feminists focuses, not on freeing ourselves from Enlightenment dualities, the project of deconstruction, but on the implications for feminism of a self solely constructed within language, and for some of the same theoretical reasons, on the notion of power and the self constructed solely in discourse. Both Derrida and Foucault privilege language. So in postmodernism have we freed ourselves from some entanglements: from the rational male subject, from the idea that truth can free us from power, only to find ourselves still entangled, but by something else? Where does this privileging of language lead us, in the construction of self, subjectivity and sexuality, and in the notion of language as competing discourses of

power and knowledge? Is ridding ourselves of all oppositional dualities enough, situating ourselves only as an effect of discourse enough, understanding power only in discursive terms enough?

As strong an argument as postmodernism makes for its deprivileging of any category, the question that might best be asked is where does postmodernism fit in the crisis of authority of the late 20th century? Does postmodernism commit the sin that it accuses others of: by privileging language, language the stalking horse for reason, are important aspects of women's lives, and important aspects of power, occluded? Can it give strength to the struggles and wishes of the age?

Does Foucault mystify power by confining subjectivity to an effect of discourse and dispensing with the material world? Everything we know is what we can say, but what we say arises out of the material conditions of our lives. Although Chris Weedon, for example, is careful to stress materiality, Foucault's strategies of discourse lie in an very uneasy relationship with the material conditions of our existence which shape how we understand the world. Foucault constructs the subject—who we are—as solely an effect of discourse, leaving us, for all intents and purposes, inhabiting the same sphere as Hegel and idealism, where the mind is privileged over the body, where sex and gender, and gender relations, can be safely ignored, where the effects of gender on social positioning need not be addressed. The dualism of the Enlightenment which he deliberately disavows, reappears. And by constructing the subject solely as an effect of discourse, he leaves us unable to conceive of how we might resist these strategies of discourse. Are power, knowledge and the subject so intertwined that they are equatable, as Foucault would ultimately have it, or is that position invidious mystification, an epistemology that doesn't so much sublimate ontology as erase it? How is the imposition of power as domination to be resisted, by a subject fully constructed from within?

Both Jane Flax and Dorothy Smith draw on the postmodern in ways that I believe resist the inherent totalitarianism in fixity and oppositional dualities without disregarding the feminist problematic, and they do so by grappling with three of the problems that postmodernism has not successfully dealt with in its anti-Enlightenment critique. Postmodernism purports to privilege nothing, but like Susan Bordo's comment that we remain within our perspective, so postmodernism privileges language; it disregards the body and privileges the mind through its emphasis on language with only the merest wave at materiality; and without a space for resistance, it can only conceive of power as domination. We might call Foucault the twentieth century Hobbes, in the war of all against all where strategies of discourse are the armies of a new civil war.

Jane Flax, a feminist psychoanalyst and political theorist who draws on Freud and Marx in developing her critique of the French postmoderns, is generally supportive of the postmodern position; she sees a number of advantages which a consideration of postmodernism brings to the feminist project. Most particularly, postmodernism means liberation from the confinement of the Enlightenment discourse which "was not meant to include women" as its internal coherence depended "partially on our continuing exclusion" (1990b, p. 230). It is the freedom which comes from the abandonment of epistemology as inevitably rooted in Enlightenment dualities which requires that women be "the other", the moon to a fixed earth, where despite the attractions of Enlightenment thought the bonds of otherness cannot be removed, where immanence, never transcendence is our lot (1990a, p. 42). What we must recognize is that "the order within our lives is an imposed, inessential structure" (Tong, 1989, p. 220).

To Flax it also means the abandonment of the fixed notion of category ["man", "woman", "class", "truth", "reason"], which is both totalizing as well as exclusionary, for the more slippery analysis of the nexus of knowledge, power and history. Feminists cannot have it both ways; we cannot have the recognition of social context as well as a fully coherent—and ultimately closed—epistemology:

We cannot simultaneously claim (1) that the mind, the self and knowledge are socially constituted and that what we can know depends upon our social practices and contexts and (2) that feminist theory can uncover the truth of the whole once and for all. Such an absolute truth (e.g. the explanation for all gender arrangements at all times is X) would require the existence of an Archimedean point outside of the whole and beyond our embeddedness in it from which we could see (and represent) the activities of perception and of reporting our vision in language. The object seen (social whole or gender arrangement) would have to be comprehended by an empty (ahistoric) mind and perfectly transcribed by/into a transparent language. The possibility of each of these conditions existing has been rendered extremely doubtful by the deconstructions of post-modern philosophers. (1990a, p. 48)

However, Flax has two major, and interrelated, concerns regarding postmodernism. In its privileging of language in the construction of the self and of subjectivity it ignores most particularly gender and, in ignoring gender, removes acknowledgement of gender relations structured by domination. At the same time it removes a place from which resistance might begin and in so doing constructs power only as domination, denying the multiple sites and multiple forms of power which postmodernism purports to advance.

To Flax, postmodernism decenters the "Enlightenment conception of a unitary or essentially rational self", restructuring the self solely as an effect of language or of strategies of discourse, without incorporating feminist theorizing about the self, which has pointed out how "gender enters into and partially constitutes both the self and our ideas about it" (1990b, p. 228). Without this incorporation, Western man remains the star of his own show, albeit in an unfamiliar version, and still blinded by the effects of his own position. This self remains the asocial and isolated self we have seen before in its modernist version, blind to its maleness and to male privilege. Flax argues that we must therefore reconceptualize the self within the wider context of social relations which

includes gender relations—some of which are structured by domination—if we are not merely to remount the same old production with the same old star.

Furthermore, by disregarding gender and gender relations, postmodernism once again assigns women to the margins by completely disregarding how we are constructed through our relations with others, in our "concrete social relations", and in particular, the first person most of us have an intimate social relationship with—our mother. Flax argues that theories which deny "the centrality of human relatedness or obviate the ways these relations become part of a complex inner world or distinctive subjectivity" may be "the latest in a long line of philosophic strategies motivated by a need to evade, deny or repress the importance of early childhood experiences, especially mother-child relationships, in the constitution of the self and the culture more generally" (Ibid, p. 232).

Flax goes on to argue that the postmodern emphasis on language alone in the construction of the self cannot explain how relations of domination are constructed, which postmodernism purports to do. As she notes, "One can seek meanings without assuming they are rational, context free, or fixed 'forever' or that meaning can be attained only through or depend on the use of reason. Play, aesthetics, empathy with or being used by others' feeling states are also sources of meaning and intelligibility" (Ibid, p. 223). To Flax, this privileging of language "denies the existence of the variety of concrete social practices that enter into and are reflected in the constitution of language itself. . . . This lack of attention to concrete social relations (including the distribution of power) results . . . in the obscuring of relations of domination. Such relations (including gender relations) then tend to acquire an aura of the inevitable and become equated with language or culture (the law of the father) as such" (Ibid, p. 47).

In this erasure of the self where we are constituted solely within language, where are the places for resistance, and what are the political implications? Where would suppressed discourses and local and particular knowledge come from except in "some

form of 'the self'? Flax asks. As she points out, "Something must exist within and among persons that is not merely an effect of the dominating discourse. Otherwise how could conflict and struggle against domination continue even in the most totalistic discursive formation?" And in addition, how could we understand the internal discipline that Foucault advances without "the existence of a human will that is not merely an effect of discourse?" (Ibid, p. 231). By ignoring gender and gender relations, and the social position from which we speak which is at least partially an effect of gender, as well as ignoring any other way through which the self could be [partially] constituted, power is conceived in a way which postmodernism would purport to preclude: it is unified rather than multiple, dominating rather than also resisting and enabling.

Whereas Flax focuses her criticism of postmodernism on the privileging of language in the construction of subjectivity, and the implications arising from that particularly for gender and power, Dorothy Smith (1990) focuses on the mystification of power rather than its explication in Foucault's strategies of discourse. To Smith, in Foucault's formulation "power has no ontology, no form of existence" (p. 70). Rather than the ethereality of Foucault's strategies of discourse that in denying the materiality of life denies both the possibility of resistance and the possibility of change, Smith proposes that instead power be "understood as arising as people's actual activities are coordinated to give the multiplied effects of cooperation. The power of objectified knowledge arises in the distinctive organization it imparts to social relations" (p. 70). She goes on to point out that

Power and knowledge are not linked in some mystical conjunction such as that enunciated by M. Foucault. What we call 'power' is always a mobilization of people's concerted activities. If facticity, if objective knowledge, is a form of power, it arises in the distinctive concerting of people's activities that breaks knowledge from the active experiencing of subjects and from the dialogic of activity or talk that brings before us a known-in-common object. Objectified

knowledge stands as a product of an institutional order mediated by texts; what it knows can be known in no other way. (p. 79-80).

To Smith, by "investigating the actual social organization of knowledge" we can "bring the social relations organizing power into the light" (p. 66). Thus, rather than being unable to grasp how strategies of discourse arise, we can begin to explicate how those relations of ruling are put into play. Power, rather than an expression in language, becomes an expression of the material conditions of life; the ontology of power reappears. Smith goes on to point out that "the contradiction between knowledge as independent of particular knowers and knowledge as arising in the activities of particular subjects is addressed here as an effect of social organization" (Ibid). In the process of stating this is what I know, pulling this knowledge out of our heads and looking at it, in this process of distancing ourselves from our social circumstances, we separate ourselves from how we came to know that knowledge, the knowledge which arises out of our own experiences and shapes us. As Smith stresses: "the externalization of knowledge in which she participates and becomes a knower is the accomplishment of social organization in which she is active" (Ibid). Thus we need to focus on the "relations coordinating people's actual sequences of action"; these relations "must be central to our investigation, for it is these actual activities that bind them into the extending sequences co-ordinating activities among many individuals and across multiple sites" (Ibid, p. 201).

In Smith's work, what Foucault calls strategies of discourse, our way of understanding the world expressed in words and given strength by power, is firmly rooted in materiality; like Smith, I am suspicious of any investigation that ends at the level of language. Words are rooted in what we do because what we do forms our understanding of ourselves. It is not words which imprison us; they have their origins in the actual material conditions of our lives. To Smith it is not where we stand and observe from, [a version of the transcendence of liberal thought] but what we do, our

experience of the lived conditions of our lives that shapes our understanding of the world. It is an understanding of the world that cannot be fixed, and therefore cannot be a source of invariable knowledge. To Smith, "the particularities of our experience allows us to explore as insiders the social relations in which we play a part" (p. 61)—particularities which provide us with the radical perspective necessary for change (cf. Rose, 1985).¹⁴ Language is a mediator between—not a reflection of—"our directly experienced world" and the "virtual reality" (p. 62). Instead of focusing on the "situated imperfection of the knower", Smith focuses on the "status of knowledge as socially and materially organized, as produced by individuals in actual settings, and as organized by and organizing definite social relations. The social organization and accomplishment of knowledge itself is the focus of inquiry" (p. 62). Like the pair of pants feminists gave to the category of man after they brought him down to earth, so does Smith situate power and knowledge in the materiality of our lives, where we might contemplate change, not just war.

What Smith and Flax point out are serious lacunae within postmodernism, lacunae which we need to take seriously, as postmodernism would demand that we do, seriously, skeptically, and scrupulously, as we pay attention to our own involvement in the construction of our own narrative, as we do to others' involvement in theirs. But as Vicky Kirby (1991) points out, arguing along much the same lines as Hekman, it's a mistake to set up as an oppositional duality feminism versus postmodernism. As feminists we need a "strategy that relentlessly shuttles between commitment and its critical interrogation" (p. 394). Oppositional dualities imprison us; they limit us needlessly through an imposed order that does little to clarify our thoughts, much to prevent us from thinking in terms of liberatory strategies. Neither feminism nor postmodernism are "unified terms" (p. 395). They are "interrogative spaces, mutable

¹⁴As Phyllis Rose wrote in *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages* (1985), the "most radical perspective is one's own".

'identities' that are constantly being renegotiated and transformed, contested and mobilized for different purposes and different effects" (p. 395-6). They intersect; they serve to remind each other what might have been forgotten, what needs to be remembered. Feminism confronts postmodernism with its own radicalism which postmodernism sometimes forgets: in the deconstitution of Western metaphysics, it is not only speech which is deprivileged, but rational man, the subject who can know; in Foucauldian discourse, the king is also a man. Postmodernism serves to remind feminism that the certainties of the Enlightenment were never ours, and cannot be; the redefinition or revalorization of women within these certainties will lead us nowhere. As Spivak has pointed out elsewhere, feminism is a political movement; postmodernism is a political corrective. The two intersect; they sometimes talk; power always intercedes.

WOMEN, MEN, WORDS AND POWER: A FEMINIST/POSTMODERNIST RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY AND THE ORGANIZATIONAL NEWCOMER

Organizational theory which relies on the assumptions of either liberal or Marxist political theory—either the individual or class as categories of analysis—cannot explicate how we as newcomers to the organization come to know relations of domination and subordination in the organization, cannot explicate the accomplishment of women's marginalization in organizations. Socialist feminist theory, with its reliance on Marxist epistemology, and drawing particularly on Lukacs—the standpoint of the capitalist versus the standpoint of the worker taken one step deeper as it were to privilege the standpoint of women, rooted in the sexual division of labour and using a revised version of alienation—is similarly handicapped with its focus on coherent theory, the unitary category and on the accessibility of subjectivity as a source of truth. These concepts have all been criticized by the postmodernists as unanalysed sites of power, where each are postulated as standing outside of relations of power and knowledge. In the formulation of its anti-Enlightenment critique, postmodernism privileges language rather than reason or praxis—our subjectivity, who we are, is constituted in language—furthermore postulating language as the expression of strategies of discourse and therefore as inevitably embroiled in the inextricable intertwining of power and knowledge to which it gives voice. In this formulation, nothing is fixed, everything is constantly in flux—in play, to use Derrida's term—not meaning, because meaning cannot be fixed except as evidence of a site of power; not reality, because reality is not something to be discovered but rather is created and recreated through the conjunction of power and knowledge; not knowledge, because knowledge cannot stand outside of power; not power, because power is not a sovereign entity but rather a strategy; not subjectivity because it is no longer understood as the unified, rational, all-knowing self of the

Enlightenment; not experience, because the link between self and experience is mediated by power.

However, postmodernist theory exists in a most uneasy relationship with feminist theory. Feminist theory is concerned explicitly with relations of women and men, what could be termed sex/gender power relations. By definition feminist theory is concerned with women and men and their relations, and if not necessarily woman and man, certainly women and men, all of whom have defined bodies. Bodies cannot be indeterminate and plural, although reality may be. As Susan Bordo wrote, the only bodies we dance in are our own—our perspective limits us, our own particular experiences shape us. As a theory which privileges language, and concentrates on the nexus of power and knowledge in the formulation of strategies of discourse which constructs our organizations as the places that we know, postmodernism has a great deal to offer organizational theory. Organizational theory can no longer blind itself to the inextricable intertwining of power and knowledge, and in so doing continue to privilege those in power. However, as a feminist, and by nature of the theory, concerned with the creation and maintenance of asymmetrical gender power relations, I am less sure that the postmodernist theories of Foucault and Derrida, Lyotard and Althusser, Freud and Lacan, not to mention their antecedents in Nietzsche and Heidegger, offer me as a woman, and women, emancipation from those relations of domination and subordination. To focus explicitly on two of the many critiques that have been advanced against the postmodernists by feminist theorists, those of Jane Flax and Dorothy Smith, both point to peculiar blindnesses in the theory that give feminists pause. To Flax, the ontology of the subject is not just sublated by the epistemology, but erased, leaving us to wonder how resistance to strategies of discourse is ever formulated if the subject disappears, as it does in Foucault's formulation. In the formulation of the self as constructed in language and positioned by strategies of discourse, where is empathy, art, relations with others, specifically between the mother and the child? And in postmodernism's

privileging of language [just another term for reason?], how is the materiality of our existence to be understood? In Dorothy Smith's formulation, it is in our ineluctable materiality that our understandings are formed, our experiences of the world as we know it, constructed. In the ethereality of language without materiality the relativity and ultimate political stasis of Foucault's conjectures is maintained. But by focusing on the materiality of our lives as accomplishing what could be termed Foucault's strategies of discourse, Smith opens the way for change and possible political action—and thus for hope—without turning gender power relations into a marginal sub-text or postulating fixity in any of its forms. Thus postmodernism intersects with feminism, feminism with postmodernism—not as a synthesis, but as skeptical, wary, occasionally illuminating, more often frustrating, talk.

