

# ECCENTRIC SUBJECTS: FEMINIST THEORY AND HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

TERESA DE LAURETIS

Consciousness, as a term of feminist thought, is poised on the divide that joins and distinguishes the opposing terms in a series of conceptual sets central to contemporary theories of culture: subject and object, self and other, private and public, oppression and resistance, domination and agency, hegemony and marginality, sameness and difference, and so on. In the early 1970s, in its first attempt at self-definition, feminism posed the question, Who or what is a woman? Who or what am I? And, as it posed those questions, feminism—a social movement of and for *women*—discovered the nonbeing of *woman*: the paradox of a being that is at once captive and absent in discourse, constantly spoken of but of itself inaudible or inexpressible, displayed as spectacle and still unrepresented or unrepresentable, invisible yet constituted as the object and the guarantee of vision; a being whose existence and specificity are simultaneously asserted and denied, negated and controlled.[1]

In a second moment of self-conscious reflection, then, addressing the question to itself, feminism would realize that a feminist theory must start from and centrally engage that very paradox. For if the constitution of the social subject depends on the nexus language/subjectivity/consciousness—if, in other words, the personal is political because the political becomes personal by way of its subjective effects through the subject's experience—then the theoretical object or field of knowledge of feminism and the modes of knowing we want to claim as feminist (method, knowledges, or consciousness) are themselves caught in the paradox of woman. They are excluded from the established discourse of theory and yet imprisoned within it or else assigned a corner of their own but denied a specificity.

*Feminist Studies* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1990). 

That, I will argue, is precisely where the particular discursive and epistemological character of feminist theory resides: its being at once inside its own social and discursive determinations and yet also outside and excessive to them. This recognition marks a further, or third, moment in feminist theory, which is its current stage of reconceptualization and elaboration of new terms: (1) a reconceptualization of the subject as shifting and multiply organized across variable axes of difference; (2) a rethinking of the relations between forms of oppression and modes of formal understanding—of doing theory; (3) an emerging redefinition of marginality as location, of identity as dis-identification; and (4) the hypothesis of self-displacement as the term of a movement that is concurrently social and subjective, internal and external, indeed political and personal.

These notions all but dispel the view of a feminism singular or unified either in its rhetorical and political strategies or in its terms of conceptual analysis. That view of feminism is prevalent in academic discourse in spite of the current emphasis on the cultural, racial, and political differences that inform an indefinite number of variously hyphenated or modified feminisms (white, black, Third World, Jewish, socialist, Marxist, liberal, cultural, structural, psychoanalytic, and so forth). Here, however, I will use the term "feminist theory," like the terms "consciousness" or "subject," in the singular, to mean not a single, unified perspective, but a process of understanding that is premised on historical specificity and on the simultaneous, if often contradictory, presence of those differences in each of its instances and practices, a process that, furthermore, seeks to account for their ideological inscriptions.

## THE PARADOX OF WOMAN

"Humanity is male," wrote Simone de Beauvoir in 1949, "and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. . . . He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other." And to stretch the point further, she quoted Emmanuel Lévinas: "Otherness reaches its full flowering in the feminine, a term of the same rank as consciousness but of opposite meaning. . . . Is there not a case in which otherness, alterity (*altérité*) unquestionably marks the nature of a being, as its

essence, an instance of otherness not consisting purely and simply in the opposition of two species of the same genus? I think that the feminine represents the contrary in its absolute sense."[2] How does it come to pass that woman, who is defined on the one hand in relation to man, although as lesser than man or an "imperfect man," is simultaneously made to represent otherness in its absolute sense?

For de Beauvoir "the category of *Other* is as primordial as consciousness itself" or, put another way, "Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought." She finds in Hegel the sense of a "hostility" of consciousness to the other: "the subject can be posed only in being opposed – he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object."[3] Thus, she suggests, by attempting to deny any reciprocity between subject and object, the (male) subject of consciousness casts woman as object in a realm of radical alterity; but because he continues to need her as "the sex," the source of sexual desire as well as offspring, he remains related (or kin) to her, and she to him, by a reciprocal need not unlike that of the master to the slave. Hence, the paradoxical definition of woman as a human being fundamentally essential to man and at the same time an inessential object, radically other.[4]

The question arises for de Beauvoir, Why does woman acquiesce to the status of object? Whence comes the submission or complicity that makes her "fail to lay claim to the status of subject" and forsake the aspiration to consciousness? For if the reciprocal need of man and woman is "equally urgent for both," as de Beauvoir says of the need of master and slave, "it always works in favor of the oppressor and against the oppressed." Her answer is that the bond which unites woman to her oppressor is not comparable to any other (such as the proletariat's to the bourgeoisie or the American Negro's to the white master) in that it can never be broken, since "the division of the sexes is a biological fact, not an event in human history . . . the cleavage of society along the line of sex is impossible." Herein lies, for de Beauvoir, "the drama of woman, [the] conflict between the fundamental aspiration of every subject (ego) – who always regards the self as the essential – and the compulsion of a situation in which she is the inessential."[5]

Several questions arise for a contemporary reader of this text: Who grants de Beauvoir the status of subject of her discourse on woman? What consciousness can she lay claim to, in the perspec-

tive of existentialist humanism, if not the very same consciousness that opposes subject and object, except that perhaps woman may be recovered for the side of the Subject and granted "full membership in the human race," while radical alterity is relocated elsewhere? Is it enough that she and a few more women, "fortunate in the restoration of all the privileges pertaining to the estate of the human being, can afford the luxury of impartiality" and so be "qualified to elucidate the situation of woman" with an "objective" attitude of "detachment"?[6] In a contemporary feminist perspective, these questions are both moot and still very much at issue. In the first instance, they are moot because history has answered them, not in her favor. The history of feminism – with its compromises, its racial arrogance, its conceptual and ideological blind spots – has made the answers painfully explicit. In the second instance, however, a self-conscious and historically conscious feminist theory cannot dispense with the paradox, the inconsistency or internal contradiction which those questions reveal in what has become one of the classic texts of feminism.

The reason we cannot dispense with it is that, for women, the paradox of woman is not an illusion or a seeming contradiction but a real one. As Catharine A. MacKinnon argues, in what appears to be a direct response to de Beauvoir, feminism is a critique ot male dominance and of the male point of view which "has forced itself upon the world, and does force itself upon the world as its way of knowing." Gender itself, she continues, is less a matter of (sexual) difference than an instance of that dominance; and the appeal to biology as determining the "fact" of women's sexual specificity is an ideological by-product of the male way of knowing, whose epistemological stance of objectivity reflects not only the Western subject's habit of control through objectification (de Beauvoir's "hostility" of consciousness) but also its eroticization of the act of control itself. In this sense, "the eroticization of dominance and submission creates gender. . . . The erotic is what defines sex as inequality, hence as a meaningful difference. . . . Sexualized objectification is what defines women as sexual *and as women* under male supremacy."[7]

To remark this point, elsewhere MacKinnon quotes John Berger's compelling account of sexual objectification in *Ways of Seeing* and significantly extends the analysis into the domain of the visual:

A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. . . . She comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman. . . . Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed, female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.[8]

Thus, it is objectification that constitutes woman as sexual, instating sexuality at the core of the material reality of women's lives, rather than the other way around, as notions of biological determinism would have it in claiming that sexual difference defines woman and causes her objectification, or as the process appears (reversed) in the "culturalist" ideology of gender. For even if "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," making herself into an erotic object for man, as de Beauvoir put it,[9] the manner of that becoming may still be explained in a similar way by arguing that it is the cultural apprehension of woman's innate sexual specificity ("difference") which causes her to be objectified in male-directed culture.

MacKinnon's point is that that sexual specificity itself is constructed at once as "difference" and as erotic by the eroticization of dominance and submission. In other words, objectification, or the act of control, defines woman's difference (woman as object/other), and the eroticization of the act of control defines woman's difference as sexual (erotic), thus, at one and the same time, defining "women as sexual and as women." And, MacKinnon suggests, this constitutive, material presence of sexuality as objectification and self-objectification ("she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision")[10] is where the specificity of female subjectivity and consciousness may be located. I would further suggest that precisely that constant turn of subject into object into subject is what grounds a different relation, for women, to the erotic, to consciousness, and to knowing.

The relations between domination, sexuality, and objectification in the male "way of knowing" and the possible configuration of a female epistemological and ontological point of view are posed by Nancy Hartsock in terms at once similar and quite divergent from

MacKinnon's "agenda for theory." Both writers start out from Marx, taking the Marxian concepts of work and labor, class oppression, and class (proletarian) standpoint as directly pertinent to feminist theory. In one case, "just as Marx's understanding of the world from the standpoint of the proletariat enabled him to go beneath bourgeois ideology, so a feminist standpoint can allow us to understand patriarchal institutions and ideologies as perverse inversions of more human social relations."[11] In the other case, as MacKinnon writes: "Marxism and feminism are theories of power and its distribution: inequality. They provide accounts of how social arrangements of patterned disparity can be internally rational yet unjust." However, while Hartsock assumes Marx's metatheoretical stance (that only the point of view of the oppressed class can reveal the real social relations and so lead to change them) and seeks to convert the notion of proletarian standpoint to a feminist standpoint based on "the sexual division of labor," MacKinnon sets up a metatheoretical parallelism between the two theories based on two terms that inscribe the relations of the subject to power and to consciousness: "Sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism: that which is most one's own, yet most taken away."[12] The resulting trajectories diverge.

Hartsock's analysis of the sexual division of labor, where "women as a sex are institutionally responsible for producing both goods and human beings," is coupled with an account of human psychological development loosely derived from object relations theory. Together, they lead her to argue that women are like workers but better, or rather, more so: "Women and workers inhabit a world in which the emphasis is on change rather than stasis, a world characterized by interaction with natural substances rather than separation from nature, a world in which quality is more important than quantity, a world in which the unification of mind and body is inherent in the activities performed." However, as women also (re)produce human beings, this activity affords them a heightened, specifically female "experience of continuity and relation – with others, with the natural world, of mind and body" which in turn "provides an ontological base for developing a non-problematic [non-contradictory?] social synthesis." Hartsock's scenario suggests a happy ending, although the trajectory runs through a path uncharted toward a structurally wobbly utopia: "Generalizing the activity of women to the social

system as a whole would raise, for the first time in human history, the possibility of a fully human community, a community structured by connection rather than separation and opposition."[13] She concludes her essay by quoting Marx, amended by writing women in, in lieu of men.

MacKinnon's trajectory, on the other hand, ends up in post-Marxism, doubling the Marxist critique back upon itself in a scenario of continuing struggle by what could be called a subject-in-process, in the here and now.

> Feminism stands in relation to marxism as marxism does to classical political economy: its final conclusion and ultimate critique. Compared with marxism, the place of thought and things in method and reality are reversed in a seizure of power that penetrates subject with object and theory with practice. In a dual motion, feminism turns marxism inside out and on its head.[14]

The point of divergence of the two trajectories is the notion of sexuality and its relation to consciousness. Although Hartsock does not use the word "sexuality" in her essay, women's specificity as social beings is said to consist in their reproductive labor, mothering, which constructs "female experience" as sensuous, relational, in contact with the concreteness of use values and material necessity, in continuity and connectedness with other people and with the natural world, and thus in direct opposition to "male experience" as "abstract masculinity."[15] The "profound unity of mental and manual labor, social and natural worlds" that characterizes women's work and the "female construction of self in relation to others" (and hence the feminist standpoint derived from them) "grows from the fact that women's bodies, unlike men's, can be themselves instruments of production." What affords women a true, nonperverse viewpoint and the potential for fully human community in a world of perverse sociosexual relations is their cultural construction as mothers (or mothering), based on the specific productivity of their bodies, their biological sexuality. Similarly, although the word "consciousness" does not appear in the essay, it is implicit in the notion of standpoint as an "engaged" vision, one which is available to the oppressed group but must be achieved or struggled for: "I use the term 'feminist' rather than 'female' here to indicate both the achieved character of a standpoint and that a standpoint by definition carries a liberatory potential."[16] Thus, in Hartsock's view, women's sexuality and consciousness of self stand in a direct, noncontradictory relation of

near-synonymity. Both are subsumed in the activity of mothering, and both are exploited thereby. What may transform female experience into feminist consciousness, what produces consciousness, is left unexplained.

MacKinnon, on the contrary, focuses on consciousness as product and the form of feminist practice, the ground of a feminist standpoint or method, and of feminism's divergence from Marxism. "Consciousness raising is the major technique of analysis, structure of organization, method of practice, and theory of social change of the women's movement." Through consciousness raising, that is to say, through "the collective critical reconstitution of the meaning of women's social experience, as women live through it," feminism has allowed women to see their social and sexual identity as both externally constructed and internalized. MacKinnon writes:

> In order to account for women's consciousness (much less propagate it) feminism must grasp that male power produces the world before it distorts it. . . . To raise consciousness is to confront male power in this duality: as total on one side and a delusion on the other. In consciousness raising, women learn they have *learned* that men are everything, women their negation, but that the sexes are equal. The content of the message is revealed true and false at the same time. . . . Their chains become visible, their inferiority–their inequality–a product of subjection and a mode of its enforcement."[17]

If consciousness raising is seen as feminist method, its difference from the method of dialectical materialism will be a crucial area of discrepancy between the two theories because "method shapes each theory's vision of social reality." Unlike dialectical materialism, which "posits and refers to a reality outside thought" and requires the separation of theory as "pure" science from situated thought, for the latter is never immune from ideology, feminist consciousness posits and refers to a reality, women's sociosexual existence, that is a "mixture of thought and materiality" and seeks to know it "through a process that shares its determination: women's consciousness, not as individual or subjective ideas, but as collective social being." Put another way, feminist "method stands inside its own determinations in order to uncover them, just as it criticizes them in order to value them on its own terms–in order to *have* its own terms at all." Consequently, feminist theory is not directed outward, toward (the analysis of) an object-reality, but turns inward, toward the "pursuit of con-

sciousness" and so "becomes a form of political practice." Finally, MacKinnon writes, if "consciousness raising has revealed gender relations to be a collective fact, no more simply personal than class relations," it can also reveal that "class relations may also be personal, no less so for being at the same time collective."[18]

This last point is particularly significant in view of the attempts, in recent Marxist theory, to establish the link between ideology and consciousness in the realm of subjectivity. Louis Althusser's own effort to define the construction of the subject in ideology by the state ideological apparatuses made him step into the area of theoretical overlap between Marxism and psychoanalysis,[19] opening up not merely the long-standing question of their possible integration but a speculative terrain in which the social relations of class may be addressed in conjunction with gender and race relations.[20] Yet, Althusser's opening of Marxist theory to the question of the subject, defined in Lacanian terms, resulted in the reaffirmation of a scientific knowledge (theory) unaffected by ideology or practices, with the consequent expulsion of subjectivity from knowledge, the containment of the subject in ideology, and of consciousness in false consciousness. MacKinnon's suggestion that feminist consciousness *can* grasp the personal, subjective effects of class or race relations, as it knows the personal yet collective effects of gender relations, is one I find more hopeful as well as more accurate and consonant with my own view of the position of the feminist subject vis-à-vis the ideology of gender.[21]

MacKinnon purports to steer clear of psychoanalysis, while Hartsock completely relies on the works of Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein for her central argument that "as a result [of the developmental account provided by object relations theory] women define and experience themselves relationally and men do not."[22] Yet, it is MacKinnon whose notion of sexuality engages, or at least raises, questions of identity and identification, the relations of subjectivity to subjection and of objectification to internalized self-image, the conflict of representation with self-representation, the contradictions between consciousness and ideological (unconscious) complicity.

Asking questions such as these, which have been the focus of the feminist critique of representation in film and literature, the media and the arts (of which the Berger passage quoted earlier sketches one of the main areas of inquiry), has contributed to

feminist theory much of its present depth, especially in the understanding of the central role of sexuality in the processes of female subjectivity and women's social identity. For example, it has contributed to dislodging female sexuality (to say nothing of pleasure) from the Procrustean bed of reproduction where patriarchal ends confine it, whether in the name of motherhood or by the name of labor. Asking the question of female sexuality and women's psycho-socio-sexual identity has meant asking it, at least initially, of psychoanalytic theory (particularly neo-Freudian psychoanalysis), because no other theory availed to articulate the terms of a female sexuality autonomous from reproduction or biological destiny. That psychoanalytic theory, in and of itself, remains inadequate to imaging – let alone accounting for – the modes and processes of a female sexuality autonomous from male sexuality, is made clear in feminist neo-Freudian or Lacanian works,[23] as well as in those based on object relations theory.[24] Nevertheless, if Hartsock's proposal of a feminist standpoint collapses on the fragility and reductionism of the latter's account of sexuality and subjectivity, MacKinnon's argument for the determining role of sexuality in women's material existence and (self)definition would only stand to gain in strength and articulation from the feminist psychoanalytic project of understanding the internalization, persistence, and reproduction of oppressive social norms within female subjectivity.

The specific contribution of neo-Freudian psychoanalysis to this understanding lies, as Juliet Mitchell emphasizes, in the notion of the unconscious: "The way we live as 'ideas' the necessary laws of human society is not so much conscious as *unconscious* – the particular task of psychoanalysis is to decipher how we acquire our heritage of the ideas and laws of human society within the unconscious mind, or, to put it another way, the unconscious mind *is* the way we acquire these laws." Commenting on this passage, in the context of the conflictual history of feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and Marxist feminism, Jacqueline Rose argues that if psychoanalysis can be seen "as the only means of explaining the exact mechanisms whereby ideological processes are transformed, via individual subjects, into human actions and beliefs," it is because psychoanalysis, like Marxism, sees those mechanisms "as determinant, but also leaving something in excess."

The political case for psychoanalysis rests on these two insights together – otherwise it would be indistinguishable from a functionalist account of the internalisation of norms. . . . The difficulty is to pull psychoanalysis in the direction of both these insights – towards a recognition of the fully social constitution of identity and norms, and then back again to that point of tension between ego and unconscious where they are endlessly remodelled and endlessly break.

When feminists and Marxists insist that any concept of psychic dynamic or internal conflict is detrimental to politics, because the attention thereby accorded to fantasy denies "an unequivocal accusation of the real," Rose states, they rely on a misconceived dichotomy between external events (oppression), which are seen as real, and internal events (the psychic manifestations of internalized oppressive norms, such as fantasy or the compulsion to repeat), which are seen as unreal.

I would argue that the importance of psychoanalysis is precisely the way that it throws into crisis the dichotomy on which the appeal to the reality of the event . . . clearly rests. Perhaps for women it is of particular importance that we find a language which allows us to recognise our part in intolerable structures – but in a way which renders us neither the pure victims nor the sole agents of our distress.[25]

MacKinnon does recognize women's part in these "intolerable structures" and their internal and conflictual character.

I think that sexual desire in women, at least in this culture, is socially constructed as that by which we come to want our own self-annihilation. That is, our subordination is eroticized in and as female. . . . This is our stake in this system that is not in our interest, our stake in this system that is killing us. I'm saying that femininity as we know it is how we come to want male dominance, which most emphatically is not in our interest.

But her analytical framework, with its emphasis on the reality of the event – the reality of oppression as event – deflects or deemphasizes the understanding of resistance in psychic terms (through processes of identification or fantasy, for instance) and thus pushes the notion of agency in the direction of what Rose calls "a politics of sexuality based on assertion and will."[26]

On the other hand, to understand the unconscious "as a point of resistance" and to take into account its specific ability to exceed the mechanisms of social determination can lead to the realization of another crucial aspect of agency and its potential for feminist politics. This is, I would agree, an issue of particular relevance to feminist theory and one that cannot be addressed in the terms of

MacKinnon's method of consciousness raising, which ignores the theory of the unconscious elaborated by neo-Freudian psychoanalysis, and whose notion of consciousness derives rather from ego psychology, although reclaimed and filtered through Georg Lukács's class consciousness. MacKinnon's dismissal of the American Freud limits her theory of feminist consciousness to a functionalist view of internalization by disallowing an account of the psychic mechanisms by which objectification is not only internalized but also resisted in female subjectivity. However, Rose's argument for the French Freud also cannot suggest a way to go beyond the institutional description of those mechanisms. "If psychoanalysis can give an account of how women experience the path to femininity, it also insists, through the concept of the unconscious, that femininity is neither simply achieved nor is it ever complete,"[27] Rose states. And that is so, of course. But let me suggest that, in order for that resistance of the unconscious to be more than pure negativity, for it to be effectively agency rather than simply unachieved or incomplete femininity, one must be able to think beyond the conceptual constraint imposed by the term "femininity" and its binary opposite – its significant other – "masculinity."

That is precisely where, in my opinion, the notion of the unconscious as excess(ive) may be most productive. Could one think, for instance, of excess as a *resistance to* identification rather than unachieved identification? Or of a *dis-identification* with femininity that does not necessarily revert or result in an identification with masculinity but, say, transfers to a form of female subjectivity that exceeds the phallic definition? These are questions that have not been posed by any denomination of psychoanalytic feminism but are nonetheless compatible with a theory of the unconscious as excess. Here I can do no more than suggest them as a crucial area of work in feminist theory.

Short of that, both Rose's and MacKinnon's views of female sexuality have a common limit in their equation of woman with femininity and in the pressure that the latter term exerts to close the critical distance between woman and women. As it stands, on the ground of that equation, Rose's eloquent case for the relevance of psychoanalysis to feminist theory goes no further than restating a "concept of subject at odds with itself," which is only the starting point, the premise to be found in Freud's own writings on female sexuality, rather than the development of a feminist psycho-

analytic theory. On her own terms, MacKinnon's absolutist emphasis on the (hetero)sexual monopoly of "male power" ("heterosexuality is the structure of the oppression of women"),[28] unmitigated by any possibility of resistance or agency through nonnormative or autonomous forms of female sexuality (excessive, subversive, perverse, invert, or lesbian sexual practices), unintentionally works to recontain both feminist consciousness and female sexuality within the vicious circle of the paradox of woman. I propose that a point of view, or an eccentric discursive position outside the male (hetero)sexual monopoly of power/knowledge – which is to say, a point of view excessive to, or not contained by, the sociocultural institution of heterosexuality – is necessary to feminism at this point in history, that such a position exists in feminist consciousness as personal-political practice and can be found in certain feminist critical texts. And that position has, in effect, provided impulse, context, and direction to feminist theoretical work, including MacKinnon's, all along.

Except for its emphasis on sexuality, a concept much more encompassing and complexly articulated in contemporary thought, feminist and otherwise, than de Beauvoir's "sexual desire and the desire for offspring," MacKinnon's analysis of women's condition is still surprisingly similar to *The Second Sex,* of which it could be read as a historical reappraisal as well as critique. "Feminism has not changed the status of women," MacKinnon writes in the introduction to her *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law,* forty years and a second wave of feminism since de Beauvoir's more optimistic introduction to *The Second Sex.* And if we ask "why feminist insights are often criticized for replicating male ideology [as de Beauvoir was], why feminists are called 'condescending to women' [as *The Second Sex* may certainly be called], when what we are doing is expressing and exposing how women are condescended to," her answer is, "Because male power has created in reality the world to which feminist insights, when they are accurate, refer."[29] That is, in de Beauvoir's words, "humanity is male."

Several things have changed, however, forty years and several social movements later, and with them, the conceptual analysis of the social relations by which that humanity is comprised. Something of that change is adumbrated in the parallel structure of the

two footnotes whereby de Beauvoir and MacKinnon support and extend their respective arguments, first citing the male writers' statements for their exemplary clarity, then criticizing their limitations due to their male-focused and self-serving point of view. De Beauvoir's criticism of Lévinas is that his description of the "mystery" of woman, "which is intended to be objective, is in fact an assertion of masculine privilege,"[30] and MacKinnon criticizes Berger for failing to recognize that women's sexual (self)objectification "expresses an inequality in social power"; and further, in support of that statement, she refers to an essay entitled "The Normative Status of Heterosexuality."[31]

In the intervening years, the critique of scientific objectivity and the understanding of the situatedness of thought itself as cultural-historical production (and hence Michel Foucault's notion of "subjugated knowledges," for example) have been developed in the context of an analysis of power, not only in economic relations but in all social relations as they are produced, articulated, and regulated by the discourses and institutions of knowledge.[32] The hegemony of objectivity as epistemological stance in all domains of knowledge, characteristic of modern Western thought, has been shaken by a reappraisal of the situatedness or "tendentiousness" of all discourses and practices – a tendentiousness that is not only class based, as in the Marxist analysis, but that is also based in any major division of power, any axis along which power differentials are organized and distributed, such as race and gender. Whence the revaluation of minority discourses and the affirmation of subjugated knowledges in the critique of colonial discourse, as well as in the feminist critique of Western culture and of Western (white) feminism itself.

From this perspective, what de Beauvoir saw as a philosopher's masculine privilege now appears as a differential rate in social power maintained and legitimated by the ideological apparatuses that *construct* the social subject, not as transcendental Subject but as subject of material social relations.[33] If, as feminist theory argues, gender is one such apparatus, with sexuality as its material ground and the body as its support or "prop,"[34] then what (re)produces and regulates a specific power differential between women and men through gender – whatever other power differentials may exist concurrently for those same women and men – is not "biological fact" but rather the institution of heterosexuality. Masculine

privilege, in this light, is not something that could be given up by an act of goodwill or a more humane ethics, for it is constitutive of the social subject en-gendered by a heterosexual social contract.[35]

The understanding of heterosexuality as an institution is a relatively recent development in feminist theory[36] and not a widely accepted one among feminists.[37] The common usage of the term "heterosexuality" to denote sexual practices between a female and a male, as distinct from homosexual or same-sex practices (more modestly, the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines the adjective "heterosexual" as "characterized by *attraction* to the opposite sex" [emphasis added]), presents the former as "natural" in opposition to the latter, "deviant" or "unnatural" acts. Thus, the very term tends to obscure the unnaturalness of heterosexuality itself – that is to say, its socially constructed nature, its dependence on the semiotic construction of gender rather than on the physical (natural) existence of two sexes. Moreover, the tenacious mental habit of associating sexuality (as sexual *acts* between people) with the private sphere or individual privacy, even as one is constantly surrounded by representations of sexuality (visual and verbal *images* of sexual acts, or images allusive to sexual acts between people), tends to deny the obvious – the very public nature of the discourses on sexuality and what Foucault has called "the technology of sex," the social mechanisms (from the educational system to jurisprudence, from medicine to the media, and so forth) that regulate sexuality and effectively enforce it – *and* that regulate and enforce it *as heterosexuality*.

The deep-seated and enduring meaning effects of such ideological reversals extend, beyond common usage and understanding, to cultural critics and theorists, feminists included, and militate against the full comprehension of the implications of otherwise accepted notions: not only the fundamental feminist concept that the personal is political but also Foucault's highly influential reconceptualization of sex as a social technology or the Lacanian view that language, or the (eminently social) Symbolic order of culture, is the "cause" of the subject, the structuring order of both subjectivity and the unconscious. The inescapable corollary of the latter view is that sexuality is located, indeed constituted, at the join of subjectivity and sociality, in the name of the Father (which, rephrased in feminist terms, is to say that sexuality is exactly "that which is most one's own, yet most taken away").[38] An example of

how the common usage sense of "custom," as local and private practice, steers the comprehension of the term "heterosexuality" away from the abstract sense of institution, "something apparently objective and systematic," deflecting it toward the restricted sense of personal relationship or "action" between individuals, is Ann Ferguson's objection to Adrienne Rich's essay on "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," that it does not account for "some heterosexual couples in which women who are feminists maintain an equal relationship with men."

> The notion that heterosexuality is central to women's oppression is plausible only if one assumes that it is women's emotional dependence on men as lovers in conjunction with other mechanisms of male dominance (e.g., marriage, motherhood, women's economic dependence on men) which allow men to control women's bodies as instruments for their own purposes. But single mothers, black women, and economically independent women, for example, may in their heterosexual relations with men escape or avoid these other mechanisms. . . . If feminism as a movement is truly revolutionary, it cannot give priority to one form of male domination (heterosexism) to the exclusion of others.[39]

The point missed here is that those heterosexual women who individually manage to avoid sexual or financial domination at home by individual men are still subjected, in the public sphere, to the objective and systematic effects of the institution that defines them, for all men and even for themselves, as women – and, in fact, as heterosexual women (for example, in issues of employment discrimination, sexual harassment, rape, incest, etc.); the institution of heterosexuality is intimately imbricated in all the "other mechanisms of male dominance" and indeed coextensive with social structure and cultural norms.

The very fact that, in most theoretical and epistemological frameworks, gender or sexual division is either not visible, in the manner of a blind spot, or taken for granted, in the manner of an a priori, reflects a heterosexual presumption – that the sociosexual opposition of "woman" and "man" is the necessary and founding moment of culture, as Monique Wittig remarks:

> Although it has been accepted in recent years that there is no such thing as nature, that everything is culture, there remains within that culture a core of nature which resists examination, a relationship excluded from the social in the analysis – a relationship whose characteristic is ineluctability in culture, as well as in nature, and which is the heterosexual relationship.[40]

Thus, it is not a question of *giving* priority to heterosexism over other systems of oppression, such as capitalism, racism, or colonialism, but of understanding the institutional character and the specificity of each and *then* of analyzing their mutual complicities or reciprocal contradictions.

## THE ECCENTRIC SUBJECT

I now want to suggest that feminist theory came into its own, or became possible as such – that is, became identifiable as feminist theory rather than a feminist critique of some other theory or object-theory – in a postcolonial mode. By this I mean it came into its own with the understanding of the interrelatedness of discourses and social practices, and of the multiplicity of positionalities concurrently available in the social field seen as a field of forces: not a single system of power dominating the powerless but a tangle of distinct and variable relations of power and points of resistance.[41] With regard to feminism, this understanding of the social as a diversified field of power relations was brought home at the turn of the eighties, when certain writings by women of color and lesbians explicitly constituted themselves as a feminist critique of feminism, an intervention in feminist theory as a form of political practice in "pursuit of consciousness." They intervened in and interrupted a feminist discourse that was anchored to the single axis of gender as sexual difference (or rather, heterosexual difference, however minutely articulated in its many instances) and that was finding itself stalemated once again in the paradox of woman.

On the notion of sexual difference as an opposition of female to male, Woman to Man, or women to men, an opposition along the axis of gender, earlier feminism built its understanding of power relations as a direct, one-way relation of oppressor to oppressed, colonizer to colonized subject. We spoke of ourselves as a colonized population and conceived of the female body as mapped by phallic desire or territorialized by Oedipal discourse. We imagined ourselves looking only through male eyes. We thought of our speech as symptomatic or unauthorized and took our writing, at its best, to express the silence of women in the language of men. Strategies of resistance and struggle derived from such under-

standing developed in two principal directions. One aimed toward equal status: it accepted the definition of woman as biologically, emotionally, and socially different but complementary to man and demanded the same rights – without considering how "the rights of man" vary with the social relations of race and class that determine the existence of actual men. That project meant, then, seeking assimilation and a place for women within a hegemonic discourse, within "the ideology of the same," as Luce Irigaray phrased it in her critique of "femininity."[42] Alternatively, the direction of radical separatism took a polarized, oppositional stance to "men" and pressed either to construct a counterhegemonic discourse, as in the anglophone notions of "women's language" and "women's culture," or to reclaim a symptomatic language of the body, as in the francophone *écriture féminine,* presumed to be subversive of the "phallogocentric" order of culture.

Both of these distinct, if intersecting, strategies were and continue to be important in particular or local contexts, but as theories they were both recontained within the boundaries of hegemonic cultural discourses. Cast as they were in the terms of liberal pluralism, socialist humanism, and aesthetic modernism, they remained un-self-consciously complicit in their racism, colonialism, and heterosexism. For even in the second strategy, although the issue of separatism itself is much more complex that its use as a label lets on, and the case can certainly be made for separatism as unavoidable, desirable, or even constitutive of feminism,[43] much early radical separatism was predicated entirely on a sense of moral outrage. Having no specific theory or conceptual analysis outside of its ethical condemnation of "patriarchy," this absolute opposition assumed the enemy's definition of the world by either adopting or reversing its terms, which were readily available at the institutional level, and thus set out to seek a territory for feminism to occupy, a wilderness to colonize, a nature in the image of woman, a "gyn/ecology" or an ethics of "pure lust."[44] How this radical feminist metaethics colluded with the ideology of the same is remarked by Audre Lorde in her "Open Letter to Mary Daly."

> I ask that you be aware of how this serves the destructive forces of racism and separation between women – the assumption that the herstory and myth of white women is the legitimate and sole herstory and myth of all women to call upon for power and background, and that nonwhite women and our herstories are noteworthy only as decorations, or examples of female victimization. I ask

that you be aware of the effect that this dismissal has upon the community of Black women and other women of Color, and how it devalues your own words. . . . When patriarchy dismisses us, it encourages our murderers. When radical lesbian feminist theory dismisses us, it encourages its own demise.[45]

The intervention or speaking out *within and against* feminism by women of color on racism, Jewish women on anti-Semitism, and lesbians of any color on heterosexism has forced feminism to confront, both emotionally and conceptually, the presence of power relations that just could not be analyzed, altered, or even addressed by the concepts of gender and sexual difference. Moreover, it showed that not only the latter, with its overt or latent stake in heterosexuality, but also a parallel notion of homosexual difference (i.e., personal and/or political lesbianism as the single requirement for membership in a utopian women's collectivity) were inadequate to account for social and power relations that were and are being (re)produced between and within women – relations causing oppression between women or groups of women and relations enforcing the repression of differences within a single group of women or within oneself.

Now, those charges of racism, heterosexism, and social privilege that were brought to feminism have been in the main accepted as well founded (although one may distinguish omission from commission, unconscious repression from hypocrisy), but perhaps they have been accepted too readily. That is to say, the claims of other stakes, other axes along which "difference," and consequently oppression, identity, and subjectivity are organized and hierarchized – the claims of race or color, ethnic, and sexual identification – have been accepted and given, as it were, equal status with the axis of gender in feminist discourse. These various axes are usually seen as parallel or coequal, although with varying "priorities" for particular women. For some women, the racial may have priority over the sexual in defining subjectivity and grounding identity; for other women the sexual may have priority; for others still it may be the ethnic/cultural that has priority at a given moment – hence the phrase one hears so often now in feminist contexts: "gender, race, and class," or its local variant, "gender, race, and class, and sexual preference." But what this string of seemingly coequal terms, conveying the notion of layers of oppression along parallel axes of "difference," does not grasp is their constant intersection and mutual implication or how each one

may affect the others – for example, how gender affects racial oppression in its subjective effects.

In her essay "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," written in 1977 and many times reprinted, Barbara Smith wrote that black male critics "are, of course, hampered by an inability to comprehend Black women's experience *in sexual as well as racial terms.*"[46] Experience is articulated, she argues, not only in sexual terms, which to a feminist seems easily understood, but also in racial terms, so that, for instance, black men, not comprehending black women's experience in sexual terms, do not comprehend it in racial terms either; that is, they do not comprehend black women's experience of racism. This is not so easy a concept for a white woman to grasp, because, from a position that is presumed to be racially unmarked, one might assume simply that all black people experience the same racism and black women also experience sexism, in addition. But what Smith is saying – and it seems plain enough a statement, almost a tautology, yet how elusive it has proved to be – is that black women experience racism not as "blacks" but as black women.

It was spelled out in the ironic title of the first black women's studies anthology, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave.* The term "blacks" does not include (comprehend) black women any more than the term "man" (white men) includes or comprehends (white) women. The black feminist concept of a simultaneity of oppressions[47] means that the layers are not parallel but imbricated into one another; the systems of oppression are interlocking and mutally determining. Smith's point, then, on the one hand, confirms that gender is a fundamental ground of subjectivity – not coincidentally she speaks as a black feminist, a black woman, and a black lesbian. But, on the other hand, it implies that, if the experience of racism shapes the experience of gender and sexuality, any white woman would be no closer than a black man to "comprehending" a black woman's experience in sexual terms, her experience of sexism, her experience of gender, and hence her sense of self as social subject. If equality by gender is no less a myth than equality by other means, then the experience of gender is itself shaped by race relations, and that must be the case, however different the outcome, for all women.

One particular account of how racial determinations are inscribed in a white woman's identity, and can be analyzed and

deconstructed through the writing of "personal history," is given in Minnie Bruce Pratt's politico-biographical essay "Identity: Skin Blood Heart."[48] Its implications for feminist theory are illuminated by Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty in their insightful reading of the essay as a feminist critical text and an enactment of the process of consciousness itself. From the purely personal, visceral sense of identity conveyed in the title, they argue, the essay moves toward "a complicated working out of the relationship between home, identity and community that calls into question the notion of a coherent, historically continuous, stable identity" and works to expose "the exclusions and repressions which support the seeming homogeneity, stability, and self-evidence of 'white identity.'"[49] Thus, they remark, the latter appears to be constituted on the marginalization of differences that exist inside as well as outside the boundaries drawn around any unitary notion of self, home, race, or community.

Pratt's autobiographical narrative is constructed as a nonlinear passage through the writer's several identities (white, middle-class, Christian-raised, southern, lesbian) and the communities that were her homes at various times of her life. Because the writing of this "personal" history is undertaken in one with the questioning of the specific geographic, demographic, architectural, and social histories of those communities—a questioning that brings to light local histories of exploitation and struggle, "histories of people unlike her," which had never been mentioned in the history told by her family—a tension between "being home" and "not being home" becomes apparent in each geographical location. Each station of the narrative becomes a site at once of personal and of historical struggles, yielding the realization that "home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance [and on] the repression of differences even within oneself."[50] Thus, while the historical narrative form makes for a "reanchoring" of the self in each of the concrete historical situations and discursive positions in which Pratt locates herself as writer and subject, nevertheless the contradictory existence of that self in each location, its "not being home," and the continual dislocation of consciousness from each form of identity to the repressed differences that support it, undercut any notion of identity as singular, coherent, unitary, *or* totally determined.

Yet again, as the return to the past provides the critical knowledge that "stable notions of self and identity are based on exclusion and secured by terror," so there is no simple escape to liberation, "no shedding the literal fear and figurative law of the father, and no reaching a final realm of freedom." To Martin and Mohanty, Pratt's personal history is a series of successive displacements from which each configuration of identity is examined in its contradiction and deconstructed but not simply discarded; instead, it is consciously assumed in a transformative "rewriting of herself in relation to shifting interpersonal and political contexts." If there is a privileged point of identification, lesbianism, which gives impetus to the work of self-(de)construction, that is not, however, a truer or essential or unifying identity, but precisely the critical vantage point, the crucial stake, "that which makes 'home' impossible, which makes her self non-identical."

> Her lesbianism is what she experiences most immediately as the limitation imposed on her by the family, culture, race, and class that afforded her both privilege and comfort, at a price. Learning at what price privilege, comfort, home, and secure notions of self are purchased, the price to herself and ultimately to others is what makes lesbianism a political motivation as well as a personal experience. . . . In Pratt's narrative, lesbianism is that which exposes the extreme limits of what passes itself off as simply human, as universal, as unconstrained by identity, namely, the position of the white middle class.

Finally, then, the concept of home itself is given up, not only the home of her childhood and the family, but any other "home," such as a women's community that would replicate the conditions of home, that is to say "the suppression of positive differences [that] underwrites familial identity." And it is replaced by a notion of community as inherently unstable and contextual, not based on sameness or essential connections, but offering agency instead of passivity; a comm-unity that is "the product of work, of struggle . . . of interpretation."[51]

The stake of Martin and Mohanty's own interpretation, which is itself a critical intervention in the contested terrain of feminist theory, is stated earlier on in their essay:

> What we have tried to draw out of this text is the way in which it unsettles not only any notion of feminism as an all-encompassing home but also the assumption that there are discrete, coherent, and absolutely separate identities – homes within feminism, so to speak – based on absolute divisions between various sexual, racial, or ethnic identities.[52]

The critical and self-critical questioning of conventional notions of experience and identity in feminist writings such as this disallows the view of a single, totalizing, "Western" feminism that would necessarily be oppressive or at best irrelevant to women of color in the world. That view, they claim, is inadequate to the situation of white women in the West; moreover, it perpetuates the opposition of West to East and white to nonwhite, leaving intact the ideological construct of their respective "unity" and so contributes to the image of a (false) homogeneity of "the West."

The understanding of feminism as a community whose boundaries shift and whose differences can be expressed and renegotiated through connections both interpersonal and political goes hand in hand with a particular understanding of individual experience as the result of a complex bundle of determinations and struggles, a process of continuing renegotiation of external pressures and internal resistances. Similarly, identity is a locus of multiple and variable positions, which are made available in the social field by historical process and which one may come to assume subjectively and discursively in the form of political consciousness.[53] The subject of this feminist consciousness is unlike the one that was initially defined by the opposition of woman to man on the axis of gender and purely constituted by the oppression, repression, or negation of its sexual difference. For one thing, it is much less pure. Indeed, it is most likely ideologically complicit with "the oppressor" whose position it may occupy in certain sociosexual relations (if not in others). Second, it is neither unified nor singly divided between positions of masculinity and femininity but multiply organized across positions on several axes of difference and across discourses and practices that may be, and often are, mutually contradictory; or, like the postmodern, marginal subject envisioned by Samuel Delany, made up of "fragments whose constitutive aspects always include other objects, other subjects, other sediments (in all of which, the notion of 'other' splits under the very pressure of analysis the split 'self' applies to locate it)."[54] Finally, and most significantly, it has agency (rather than "choice"), the capacity for movement or self-determined (dis)location, and hence social accountability.

I suggested earlier that feminist theory came into its own in a post-

colonial mode. I will now restate that as follows: if a history of feminism may be said to begin "when feminist texts written by women and a feminist movement conscious of itself came together,"[55] a feminist critical theory as such begins when the feminist critique of sociocultural formations (discourses, forms of representation, ideologies) becomes conscious of itself and turns inward, as MacKinnon suggests, in pursuit of consciousness – to question its own relation to or possible complicity with those ideologies, its own heterogeneous body of writing and interpretations, their basic assumptions and terms, and the practices which they enable and from which they emerge. It starts by "recognizing our location, having to name the ground we're coming from, the conditions we have taken for granted," as Rich writes in her "Notes toward a Politics of Location."[56] It then proceeds to articulate the situatedness, political-historical (now) as well as personal-political, of its own thought. But then, or again, in order to go on with the work of social and subjective transformation, in order to sustain the movement, it has to dis-locate itself, to dis-identify from those assumptions and conditions taken for granted. This feminist theory, which is only just beginning, does not merely expand or reconfigure previous discursive boundaries by the inclusion of new categories, but it also represents and enacts a shift in historical consciousness.

The shift entails, in my opinion, a dis-placement and a self-dis-placement: leaving or giving up a place that is safe, that is "home" – physically, emotionally, linguistically, epistemologically – for another place that is unknown and risky, that is not only emotionally but conceptually other; a place of discourse from which speaking and thinking are at best tentative, uncertain, unguaranteed. But the leaving is not a choice: one could not live there in the first place. Thus, both aspects of the dis-placement, the personal and the conceptual, are painful: they are either, and often both, the cause and/or the result of pain, risk, and a real stake with a high price. For this is "theory in the flesh," as Cherríe Moraga has called it,[57] a constant crossing of the border (*Borderlines/"La Frontera"* is the title of Gloria Anzaldúa's recent book about "the new *mestiza*"), a remapping of boundaries between bodies and discourses, identities and communities – which may be a reason why it is primarily feminists of color and lesbian feminists who have taken the risk.

That displacement – that dis-identification with a group, a family, a self, a "home," even a feminism, held together by the exclusions and repression that enable any ideology of the same – is concurrently a displacement of one's point of understanding and conceptual articulation. Thus, it affords a redefinition of the terms of both feminist theory and social reality from a standpoint at once inside and outside their determinations. I believe that such an eccentric point of view or discursive position is necessary for feminist theory at this time, in order to sustain the subject's capacity for movement and displacement, to sustain the feminist movement itself. It is a position of resistance and agency, conceptually and experientially apprehended outside or in excess of the sociocultural apparatuses of heterosexuality, through a process of "unusual knowing"[58] or a "cognitive practice"[59] that is not only personal and political but also textual, a practice of language in the larger sense.

Something of that displacement is inscribed in the very title of Wittig's 1981 essay, "One Is Not Born a Woman," a phrase from de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* rewritten by the writer of *The Lesbian Body*. The repetition invokes, ironically, the heterosexual definition of woman as "the second sex" and displaces it by shifting the emphasis from the word *born* to the word *woman* (a displacement that is doubled by Wittig's geographical and cultural dis-location from France to the United States, where she now lives and works). In the following pages, I will use this extraordinarily rich and suggestive text to gather the threads of the argument I've been pursuing in my intertextual meanderings across a discursive space of writings by women as far (or as little) apart historically as 1949 France and the U.S. *frontera* in 1987.

Like de Beauvoir, Hartsock, and MacKinnon, Wittig starts from the premise that women are not a "natural group" with common biological features, whose oppression would be a consequence of that "nature," but a social category, the product of an economic relation of exploitation, and an ideological construct. Therefore (and here she leaves de Beauvoir, taking instead the materialist feminist analysis of Christine Delphy), women are a social class with shared interests based on their specific condition of exploitation and domination, gender oppression, which affords them a standpoint, a position of knowledge and struggle, that is (as Hartsock argues, but in quite another direction) analogous to the standpoint of the proletariat. Women can thus attain consciousness of

themselves as a class, and this coming to consciousness in a political movement is what feminism represents. "The condition of women," writes Delphy, "became 'political' once it gave rise to a struggle, and when at the same time this condition was thought of as oppression." As the oppression of the proletariat was the necessary premise for Marx's theory of capital, and the conceptualization of that oppression was only possible from the precise location of the oppressed, similarly, "it is only from the point of view and life experience of women that their condition can be seen as oppression." The women's movement and the simultaneous feminist conceptualization of women's experience as a specific oppression in and through sexuality make sexuality a major site of class struggle. This adds a new domain of experience to historical materialist analysis and brings about a new understanding of the political domain that "may overturn it from top to bottom. The same thing could be expressed by saying that women's consciousness of being oppressed changes the definition of oppression itself."[60]

This redefinition of *oppression* as a political and subjective category that is arrived at from the specific standpoint of the oppressed, in their struggle, and as a form of consciousness – and thus distinct from the economic, objective category of exploitation – rejoins the original formulation of oppression and identity politics given in the mid-1970s by the U.S. black feminist group, the Combahee River Collective.

> Black feminists and many more Black women who do not define themselves as feminists have all experienced sexual oppression as a constant factor in our day-to-day existence. . . . However, we had no way of conceptualizing what was so apparent to us, what we *knew* was really happening . . . before becoming conscious of the concepts of sexual politics, patriarchal rule, and most importantly, feminism, the political analysis and practice that we women use to struggle against our oppression. . . .
>
> This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity. . . . Although we are feminists and Lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand. . . . We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism. . . . We need to articulate the real class situation of persons who are not merely raceless, sexless workers, but for whom racial and sexual oppression are significant determinants in their working/economic

lives. Although we are in essential agreement with Marx's theory as it applied to the very specific economic relationships he analyzed, we know that his analysis must be extended further in order for us to understand our specific economic situation as Black women.[61]

This fundamental redefinition of social and economic oppression in relation to subjectivity and identity, on the one hand, and to the subject's capacity of resistance and agency, on the other, hinges on the notion of consciousness that I have been trying to delineate as historically specific to contemporary feminism and the basis of feminist theory as such. Not coincidentally, therefore, Delphy's analysis has also several points of contact with MacKinnon's, and her critique of hyphenated Marxist-feminism suggests a post-Marxist stance.

In "A Materialist Feminism *Is* Possible" (1980), a lengthy response to a review by Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh (1979), Delphy argues that "if the left refuses a materialist analysis [only in relation to women's oppression] it is because this risks leading to the conclusion that it is men who benefit from patriarchal exploitation, and not capital . . . men are the class which oppresses and exploits women." If socialist feminists persist in seeing the oppression of women as a "secondary consequence of class antagonism *between men*," and if they so desire to exempt men from responsibility for the oppression of women, it can only be in consequence of the belief "that there must necessarily be close and permanent relations between most females and most males at all times," a belief that has its basis in the ideology of heterosexuality (and was adamantly stated by de Beauvoir in the passage quoted above). Delphy concludes with what seems to be a prophecy but is actually an understatement: "I think that this will be the next debate in the movement . . . the breaking of the last ideological barrier *and* the way out of the tunnel on the question of the relationship between lesbianism and feminism."[62] For in the essay here under discussion, written at approximately the same time and in the same context – the work of the French journal, *Questions féministes* – Wittig has already crossed that barrier and taken Delphy's analysis very far from home.

Indeed, the way out of the tunnel leads to what I see as a crossroads for feminist theory at this moment: one road (if women are not a class for themselves) leads back to the paradox of woman, the maze of sexual difference, the axial oppositions of gender,

race, and class, the debate on priorities, and so on; the other road (if women are an oppressed class, that is involved in the struggle for the disappearance of all classes) leads toward the disappearance of women. The divergence of this road, the one taken by Wittig, from the previously outlined scenarios of a feminist future appears most drastic when she imagines what female people would be like in such a classless society. It is suggested to her by the very existence of a "lesbian society" which, however marginal, does function in a certain way autonomously from heterosexual institutions. For, she claims, lesbians are not women: "the refusal to become [or to remain] heterosexual always meant to refuse to become a man or a woman, consciously or not. For a lesbian this goes further than the refusal of the *role* 'woman.' It is the refusal of the economic, ideological, and political power of a man."[63] I will return to this after summarizing her argument.

Also situating herself in the materialist feminist perspective that here I have been calling post-Marxist, in the sense indicated by MacKinnon, Wittig mobilizes the discourses of historical materialism and liberal feminism in an interesting strategy, one against the other and each against itself, proving them both inadequate to defining the subject in materialist terms. First, she deploys the Marxist concepts of ideology, social relations, and class to critique mainstream feminism, arguing that to accept the terms of gender as sexual difference, which construct woman as an "imaginary formation" on the basis of women's biological-erotic value to men, makes it impossible to understand that the very terms "woman" and "man" "are political categories and not natural givens" and thus to question the real socioeconomic relations of gender. Second, however, claiming the feminist notion of self, a subjectivity that, although socially produced, is apprehended in its concrete–personal–singularity, Wittig holds *that* notion against Marxism, which, on its part, denies an individual subjectivity to the members of the oppressed classes. Although "materialism and subjectivity have always been mutually exclusive," she insists on both class consciousness and individual subjectivity at once: without the latter "there can be no real fight or transformation. But the opposite is also true; without class and class consciousness there are no real subjects, only alienated individuals."[64]

What joins the two, and what permits the redefinition of both class consciousness and individual subjectivity as "personal

history," is the concept of oppression I discussed earlier and its relation to feminist consciousness.

> When we discover that women are the objects of oppression and appropriation, at the very moment that we become able to perceive this, we become subjects in the sense of cognitive subjects, through an operation of abstraction. Consciousness of oppression is not only a reaction to (fight against) oppression. It is also the whole conceptual reevaluation of the social world, its whole reorganization with new concepts, from the point of view of oppression . . . call it a subjective, cognitive practice. The movement back and forth between the levels of reality (the conceptual reality and the material reality of oppression, which are both social realities) is accomplished through language.

Wittig's "subjective, cognitive practice" is a reconceptualization of the subject, of the relation of subjectivity to sociality, and of knowledge itself from a position that is experientially autonomous from institutional heterosexuality and therefore exceeds the terms of its discursive-conceptual horizon.

> Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation ("forced residence," domestic corvée, conjugal duties, unlimited production of children, etc.), a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become or to stay heterosexual.[65]

Here, then, is the sense in which she proposes the disappearance of women as the goal of feminism. The struggle against the ideological apparatuses and socioeconomic institutions of women's oppression consists in refusing the terms of the heterosexual contract,[66] not only in one's practice of living but also in one's practice of knowing. It consists, as well, in concurrently conceiving of the social subject in terms that exceed, are other than, autonomous from, the categories of gender. The concept "lesbian" is one such term.

The difficulty in grasping or defining a term excluded from a given conceptual system, according to Marilyn Frye, is that "the standard vocabulary of those whose scheme it is will not be adequate to the defining of a term which denotes it." If the term "lesbian" proves to be extraordinarily resistant to standard procedures of semantic analysis (and Frye proves that it is), it is because "lesbians are not countenanced by the dominant conceptual scheme," as well as being absent "in the lexicon of the King's English"; so

much so that even the attempt to come to a definition of the term "lesbian" by cross-references through several dictionaries is "a sort of flirtation with meaninglessness – dancing about a region of cognitive gaps and negative semantic spaces." Why is it, she asks to begin with, "that when I try to name myself and explain myself, my native tongue provides me with a word . . . which means *one of the people from Lesbos?*" And she goes on to demonstrate how the foreclosure of lesbianism from conceptual reality is systematically overdetermined with such "metaphysical overkill" that its motivation becomes apparent as the design to keep "women generally in their metaphysical place." However, Frye also claims that being outside a conceptual system puts one "in a position to see things that cannot be seen from within"; to assume that position, to displace oneself from the system, to dis-locate, dis-affiliate, or disengage one's attention from it, is to experience "a reorientation of attention . . . a feeling of disengagement and re-engagement of one's power as a perceiver."[67]

Like Rich's white woman "disloyal to civilization,"[68] like Anzaldúa's "new *mestiza*" and Smith's "home girls," Frye's lesbian "disloyal to phallocratic reality" is the subject of an "unusual knowing," a cognitive practice, a form of consciousness that is not primordial, universal, or coextensive with human thought, as de Beauvoir believed, but historically determined and yet subjectively and politically assumed. Like them, Wittig's lesbian is not simply an individual with a personal "sexual preference" or a social subject with a simply "political" priority, but an eccentric subject constituted in a process of struggle and interpretation, a rewriting of self – as Martin and Mohanty say – in relation to a new understanding of community, of history, of culture. And this is what I take Wittig's "lesbian society" to be: not a descriptive term for a type of (nontraditional) social organization, nor a blueprint for a futuristic, utopian, or dystopian society – like the ones imagined in Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* or even like the amazon community of Wittig's own *Les Guérillères* – but rather the term for a conceptual and experiential space carved out of the social field, a space of contradictions, in the here and now, that need to be affirmed but not resolved; a space in which the "Inappropriate/d Other," as Trinh T. Minh-ha imagines her, "moves about with always at least two/four gestures: that of affirming 'I am like you' while pointing insistently to the difference; and that of reminding 'I am different'

while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at."[69]

Wittig's terms "lesbian" and "lesbian society" sustain the tension of that multiple and contradictory gesture. Even as she asserts that lesbians are not women, she cautions against the writings of "lesbian-feminists in America and elsewhere" that would have us again entrapped in the myth of woman. Yet, refusing to be a woman does not make one become a man. Finally, therefore, "a lesbian *has to* be something else, a not-woman, a not-man."[70] Thus, when she concludes "It is *we* who historically must undertake the task of defining the individual subject in materialist terms," that *we* is the dis-placed point of articulation from which to rewrite both Marxism and feminism, rejoining the critique of the sex-gender system with the "political economy of sex,"[71] as Gayle Rubin once called it. But Wittig's "we" is not the privileged women of de Beauvoir, "qualified to elucidate the situation of woman"; nor does her "lesbian society" refer to some collectivity of gay women, any more than "lesbian" refers to an individual woman with a particular "sexual preference." They are, rather, the theoretical terms of a form of feminist consciousness that can only exist historically, in the here and now, as the consciousness of a "something else."

We, lesbian, *mestiza,* and inappropriate/d other are all terms for that excessive critical position which I have attempted to tease out and re-articulate from various texts of contemporary feminism: a position attained through practices of political and personal displacement across boundaries between sociosexual identities and communities, between bodies and discourses, by what I like to call the eccentric subject.

## NOTES

Much of the thinking that went into this essay took place in the context of my teaching at the University of California, Santa Cruz, over the past four years. An earlier and shorter version was presented at the Conference on "Feminism and the Critique of Colonial Discourse" held at UCSC on April 25, 1987; other versions were presented at several universities in Europe, Canada, and the United States. I am indebted to my students and colleagues in the History of Consciousness Program for both formal and informal discussions of these issues and to the UCSC Academic Senate for a 1986-87 grant which partially supported this research. A special debt of joyful wisdom I owe Kirstle McClure for her lucid criticisms of the manuscript and her enlightening discussion of these and other issues of feminist theory.

1. On the distinction between the terms "woman" (or "Woman") and "women"—a distinction crucial to grasping and conveying the paradoxical status of women in the dominant discourses of Western culture—see my book, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 5-6. In chapter 6, I also introduced and discussed other terms of particular relevance to feminist theory and to this essay, such as experience, subjectivity, and (self)consciousness. See especially 159 and 184-86.
2. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* trans. H.M. Parshley (1949; New York: Vintage, 1974), xviii-xix; Emmanuel Lévinas, quoted, xix.
3. De Beauvoir, xx.
4. A similarly paradoxical definition of woman as both human subject and object of exchange between men, as both speaker and sign of the language (kinship) by which men, in making culture, communicate with one another across generations, is given in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté,* also published in 1949. In fact, de Beauvoir thanks him for allowing her to see this work in proofs and acknowledges using it "liberally" in *The Second Sex* (p. xx).
5. De Beauvoir, xxiii, xxxiv.
6. Ibid., xxxii.
7. Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 50, emphasis added.
8. John Berger, quoted in Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory," in *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology,* ed. Nannerl O. Keohane, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Barbara C. Gelpi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 26.
9. De Beauvoir, 301.
10. MacKinnon, 26.
11. Nancy C.M. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science,* ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Reidel, 1983), 284.
12. MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State," 2, 1.
13. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint," 291, 290, 303, 305.
14. MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State," 30.
15. A version of Hartsock's 1983 essay, "The Feminist Standpoint," appears as chapter 10 of her *Money, Sex, Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985). Elsewhere in the book, Hartsock does address the issue of sexuality, defining it quite broadly as "a series of cultural and social practices and meanings that both structure and are in turn structured by social relations more generally." She cites Jeffrey Weeks and Robert Stoller and gives as further footnote references for her view the anthropologists Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, as well as Adrienne Rich and Ann Ferguson et al.: Because these "theorists have argued for this position in several different contexts," Hartsock states, "it seems unneccesary to go into detail here, but to indicate that I subscribe in a general way to their arguments" (p. 156). Surely, however, the only "position" on sexuality that can be gleaned from such heterogeneous sources—two of whom are explicitly engaged in open debate (Rich and Ferguson, as I will discuss later on)—is little more than their minimal common denominator, that is, the overgeneralized view, indeed the cliché, that sexuality is "cultural." Such a reductive, if not outright simplistic, notion of sexuality is doubtless accountable for Hartsock's displeasure with feminist (lesbian) authors who, while "they see sexuality as a cultural creation . . . often go on to argue in ways that suggest that changing sexuality is an impossibility" (p. 179); but what "changing sexuality" might mean, in fact, Hartsock does not say. That the authors in question are writing about lesbian pornography and sadomasochism is not coincidental, for most of this chapter on

sexuality, entitled "Gender and Power: Masculinity, Violence, and Domination," deals with pornography and perversion. Thus, the overall view conveyed in the book is that sexuality is something defined and imposed by the masculine, negative eros, which is shared by women and men alike in a "community grounded on a sexuality structured by violence, domination, and death" (p. 178). To this, then, Hartsock opposes the potential for a "fully human community" that is inherent in women's "experience" of maternal sexuality (p. 256), erotic fusion and empathy with the sexual partner (p. 257), and in the "capacity for a variety of relations with others that grows from the experience of being mothered by a woman" (p. 158). In short, masculinity is to mothering (women) as abstract is to concrete, separation to connection, violence to nurturance, death to life, in a series of binary oppositions which are built on the primary couple nonreproductive (masculine) vs. reproductive (female) sexuality.

16. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint," 299, 289.
17. MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State," 5, 29, 28.
18. Louis Althusser, cited in MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State," 13, 29.
19. Compare "Freud and Lacan" as well as "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses" in Louis Althusser's *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays,* trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).
20. For example, see Julian Henriques et al., *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation, and Subjectivity* (London: Methuen, 1984), in the context of post-Althusserian debates on discourse theory in Britain, and the related work of the Marxist journal, *Ideology and Consciousness.*
21. See Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays in Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), chap. 1.
22. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint," 295.
23. For example, see Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman,* trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985); Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (London: Penguin, 1974); Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986); Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982); Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); and Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).
24. See Jane Flax, "Political Philosophy and the Patriarchal Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Epistemology and Metaphysics," in *Discovering Reality;* Jessica Benjamin, "A Desire of One's Own: Psychoanalytic Feminism and Intersubjective Space," in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies,* ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 78-101; and Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
25. Juliet Mitchell, cited in Rose, 6; ibid., 7, 12, 14.
26. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified,* 54; Rose, 7.
27. Rose, 7.
28. Ibid., 15; MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified,* 60.
29. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified,* 2, 59.
30. De Beauvoir, 44.
31. Purple September Staff, "The Normative Status of Heterosexuality," in *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement,* ed. Charlotte Bunch and Nancy Myron (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975), cited by MacKinnon, 26.
32. See Wini Breines and Linda Gordon, "The New Scholarship on Family Violence," *Signs* 8 (Spring 1983): 490-531; Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986); Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Ruth Bleier, *Science and Gender: A*

*Critique of Biology and Its Theories on Women* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984); and Donna Haraway, "Teddy-Bear Patriarchy," *Social Text*, no. 11 (1984-85): 20-64.

33. For a discussion of Althusser and Foucault in relation to the issue of gender, see de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, chap. 1.

34. For example, see Silverman; and Mary Ann Doane, "Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body," *October*, no. 17 (1981): 23-36.

35. I have developed the notion of a heterosexual or Oedipal social contract, suggested in Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind," *Feminist Issues*, no. 1 (Summer 1980): 103-10, in Teresa de Lauretis, "The Female Body and Heterosexual Presumption," *Semiotics* 67, nos. 3-4 (1987): 259-79.

In the term "oedipal contract" I want to bring together and into view the semiotic homology of several conceptual frameworks: Saussure's notion of language as social contract; Rousseau's "social contract" with its gender distinction; Freud's "Oedipus complex" as the structuring psychic mechanism responsible for the orientation of human desire and the psychosocial construction of gender; the "cinematic contract" that stipulates the conditions of vision by encoding the specific relations of image and sound to meaning and to subjectivity for the film's spectator . . and finally, Wittig's "heterosexual contract" as the agreement between modern theoretical systems and epistemologies not to question the a priori of gender, and hence to presume the sociosexual opposition of "man" and "woman" as the necessary and founding moment of culture.

36. See Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Sexual Harassment of Working Women: A Case of Sex Discrimination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in her *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986); and Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind," and "One Is Not Born a Woman," *Feminist Issues*, no. 2 (Winter 1981): 47-54.

37. For example, see Ann Ferguson, "Patriarchy, Sexual Identity, and Sexual Revolution," *Signs* 7 (Autumn 1981): 158-72.

38. MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State," 1. An interesting parallel to the trajectory of feminist thinking about heterosexuality from private sexual practice to institution, and its continuing slippage between the personal and the political, is the historical trajectory of the English word "institution" according to Raymond Williams's *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

**Institution** is one of several examples (cf. CULTURE, SOCIETY, EDUCATION) of a noun of action or process which became, at a certain stage, a general and abstract noun describing something apparently objective and systematic; in fact, in the modern sense, an **institution.** It has been used in English since C14, from fw [immediate forerunner] *institution,* oF [old French], *institutionem,* L [Latin], from rw [root word] *statuere,* L–establish, found, appoint. In its earliest uses it had the strong sense of an act of origin–something **instituted** at a particular point in time– but by mC16 there was a developing general sense of practices established in certain ways, and this can be read in a virtually modern sense. . . . But there was still, in context, a strong sense of custom, as in the surviving sense of "one of the institutions of the place." It is not easy to date the emergence of a fully abstract sense; it appears linked, throughout, with the related abstraction of SOCIETY (q.v.). By mC18 an abstract sense is quite evident, and examples multiply in C19. . . . In C20 **institution** has become the normal term for any organized element of a society. (Pp. 139-40).

It might be interesting to speculate whether, just as *institution* became affirmed as an abstract term concurrently with *society,* of which it is a primary condition of existence, the abstract sense of *heterosexuality* as institution came to feminism with the affirmation of *feminist theory* as a form of knowledge, a critical theory whose critical existence is conditioned by that institution. I note apropos that Williams's *Keywords* has no entry for Gender, Feminism, Sexuality (of any kind) or Consciousness (although the latter appears under class as class consciousness and under ideology as false consciousness).

39. Williams, 139; Ferguson, 170, 171.

40. Wittig, "The Straight Mind," 107.

41. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* vol. 1, *An Introduction,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980), 92-96.
42. Irigaray, 11-129.
43. See, for example, Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1983), 95-109.
44. See Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," in *Writing and Sexual Difference,* ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 9-35; Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), and *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).
45. Audre Lorde, "Open Letter to Mary Daly," in her *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1984), 69.
46. See Barbara Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," in *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies,* ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (Old Westbury, N.Y.: The Feminist Press, 1982), 162, emphasis added.
47. Barbara Smith, ed., *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1983), 272-82.
48. See Minnie Bruce Pratt's "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," in Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Barbara Smith, *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectices on Anti-Semitism and Racism* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Long Haul Press, 1984).
49. Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?" in de Lauretis, *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies,* 195, 193.
50. Ibid., 196.
51. Ibid., 197, 201, 210, 203, 210.
52. Ibid., 192.
53. The assumption of an identity as "women of color" in the United States (and similarly of a "black" identity in Britain) on the part of women from highly diversified cultural and ethnic backgrounds – Asian, native American, black American and Caribbean women, Chicanas, Latinas, and so forth – is an example of personal-political consciousness that is not simply based on ethnic and cultural *differences* vis-à-vis the dominant white culture, and that is not at all the op-position of one set of cultural values, stable in a given ethnic minority, to the equally stable values of the dominant majority. The identity as a woman of color is one developed out of the specific historical experience of racism in the contemporary Anglo-American culture and the white- and male-dominated society of the United States today; it is developed out of an understanding of the personal-political need for building community across, in spite of, in tension, even in contradiction with the cultural values of one's ethnic background, one's family, one's "home." See Cherríe Moraga, *Loving in the War Years* (Boston: South End Press, 1984); Mirtha Quintanales, "I Paid Very Hard for My Immigrant Ignorance," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color,* ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1983), 150-56; Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, "Some Notes on Jewish Lesbian Identity," in *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology* (Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1982), 28-44; Cheryl Clarke, "Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance," in *This Bridge Called My Back,* 128-37; and Merle Woo, "Letter to Ma," in ibid., 140-47.
54. Samuel R. Delany, "Interview" with Takayuki Tatsumi, *Diacritics* 16 (Fall 1986): 27-43.
55. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds. *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 3.
56. Rich would not call it theory, however, for theory, she believes, "isn't good for the earth," is too white-centered. It has not yet sufficiently engaged the political theory of

black U.S. feminism and the texts of other women of color (see Rich, *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*, 210-31). And in this sense she is right. But why continue to disallow a critical practice which has been both transformative and transformed in the work of feminist writers, academics, and activists (compare with Paula A. Treichler's "Teaching Feminist Theory," in *Theory in the Classroom*, ed. Cary Nelson [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986], 57-128)? And why discard the term "theory" just when women of color have begun to claim it (e.g., Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margins to Center* [Boston: South End Press, 1984])? On the politics of location, see also Adrienne Rich, "Blood, Bread, and Poetry: The Location of the Poet," in her *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*, 167-87.

57. See Moraga and Anzaldúa, 23.
58. Frye, 154.
59. Wittig, "One Is Not Born a Woman," 52.
60. Christine Delphy, *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*, trans. and ed. Diana Leonard (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 217, 218.
61. "The Combahee River Collective Statement," in *Home Girls*, 274-78.
62. Christine Delphy, "A Materialist Feminism *Is* Possible," in *Close to Home*, 178-79, 180, 181.
63. Wittig, "One Is Not Born a Woman," 49.
64. Ibid., 50, 53.
65. Ibid., 52, 53.
66. See Wittig's "The Straight Mind."
67. Frye, 154-55, 150, 171-73.
68. Adrienne Rich, "Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynephobia," in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silences: Selected Prose, 1966-1978* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), 275-310.
69. Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Introduction," *Discourse*, no. 6 (1986-87): 9.
70. Wittig, "One Is Not Born a Woman," 49.
71. Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Rapp Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157-210.