

Issue
2002

1

GENDER FORUM

An Internet Journal for Gender Studies



Genderealisations: Locating Gender Studies

Edited by
Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier

ISSN 1613-1878

Universität
zu Köln



Editor

Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier

University of Cologne
English Department
Albertus-Magnus-Platz
D-50923 Köln/Cologne
Germany

Tel +49-(0)221-470 2284

Fax +49-(0)221-470 6725

email: gender-forum@uni-koeln.de

Editorial Office

Laura-Marie Schnitzler, MA

Sarah Youssef, MA

Christian Zeitz (General Assistant, Reviews)

Tel.: +49-(0)221-470 3030/3035

email: gender-forum@uni-koeln.de

Editorial Board

Prof. Dr. Mita Banerjee,

Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (Germany)

Prof. Dr. Nilufer E. Bharucha,

University of Mumbai (India)

Associate Prof. Dr. Carmen Birkle,

Philipps-Universität Marburg (Germany)

Prof. Dr. Ingrid Hotz-Davies,

Eberhard Karls University Tübingen (Germany)

Prof. Dr. Ralph Poole,

University of Salzburg (Austria)

Prof. Dr. Kathryn Schaffer,

University of Adelaide (Australia)

Prof. Dr. Chris Weedon,

Cardiff University (UK)

Editorial Deadlines

Spring Issue:

abstracts (October 1),

completed papers (January 1)

Summer Issue:

abstracts (January 1),

completed papers (April 1)

Fall Issue:

abstracts (April 1),

completed papers (July 1)

Early Career Researchers Special Issue:

abstracts (May 1),

completed papers (August 1)

Winter Issue:

abstracts (July 1),

completed papers (October 1)

About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. *gender forum* also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

Opinions expressed in articles published in *gender forum* are those of individual authors and not necessarily endorsed by the editors of *gender forum*.

Submissions

Target articles should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition) and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length. Please make sure to number your paragraphs and include a bio-blurb and an abstract of roughly 300 words. Files should be sent as email attachments in Word format. Please send your manuscripts to gender-forum@uni-koeln.de.

We always welcome reviews on recent releases in Gender Studies! Submitted reviews should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition), have numbered paragraphs, and should be between 750 and 1,000 words in length. Please note that the reviewed releases ought to be no older than 24 months. In most cases, we are able to secure a review copy for contributors.

Article Publishing

The journal aims to provide rapid publication of research through a continuous publication model. All submissions are subject to peer review. Articles should not be under review by any other journal when submitted to *Gender forum*.

Authors retain copyright of their work and articles are published under a Creative Commons licence.

There are no submission or page charges, and no colour charges.

Detailed Table Of Contents

Editorial	1
Natascha Würzbach: The State of Gender Studies in Germany: The current situation in research, teaching and institutions	2
Victoria Smith: The Attack of the Fifty-Foot Woman, or how (White, Anglo-American) Feminism Went From Jouissance to Melancholy	20
Chris Weedon: Key Issues in Postcolonial Feminism: A Western Perspective	43
Paul Cooke (Review): Sara Ahmed. <i>Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Postcoloniality</i>	55
Allison Fell (Review): Stephanie Lawler. <i>Mothering the Self: Mothers, Daughters, Subjects</i>	60
Dirk Schulz (Review): Murray Pomerance: <i>Ladies and Gentleman, Boys and Girls: Gender in film at the end of the twentieth century</i>	65
Sarita See (Review): Gender, Race, and Internal Colonization: An Asian Americanist Review of Traise Yakamoto's <i>Masking Selves, Making Subjects: Japeanese American Women, Identity, and the Body</i>	71
List of Contributors	74

Editorial

1 **Genderealisations** is the first issue of the new electronic journal **gender forum**. It features informative survey articles by internationally acclaimed critics. While the first two essays provide an overview of the status of feminism in Germany and the United States, the latter is concerned with the discussion of gender and postcolonial issues. Reviews related to this research complete the issue.

The State of Gender Studies in Germany: The current situation in research, teaching and institutions

By Prof. Dr. Natascha Würzbach, University of Cologne, Germany

Abstract:

After thirty years of women's and gender studies we can see that the subject has established itself in two ways. By many academics it is regarded merely as a label testifying to their political correctness, whereas some view it as an area of research with considerable potential. Prof. Würzbach outlines and analyses the different currents within gender studies and their struggles for academic integration in Germany, their developments, controversies and expanding forces.

1 After thirty years of women's and gender studies we can see that the subject has established itself in two ways. By many academics it is regarded merely as a label testifying to their political correctness, whereas some view it as an area of research with considerable potential. If however we ask where prospective students of gender studies can apply to in Germany, or who encourages students' or university teachers' interest in the subject, the answers are not at all obvious. Institutions, researchers and teachers of gender studies are not easy to find. The subject rarely forms part of the remit of a university chair or even of a course of study. In some cases a specific central institution of a university is responsible for gender studies, and individual postgraduate programs have more or less explicitly included the topic in their courses. The occasional research project also focuses on the theme. Finally, a number of lecture courses in various disciplines at many universities reveal an interest in the subject.

2 Much research is thus needed to discover gender studies in Germany's academic system. In contrast to the USA and Britain, where gender studies has for many years been permanently built into courses at most universities, in Germany this academic area flourishes almost in secret - though where it does, it is most effective and successful. Institutional resistance, still rife today especially in conservative universities, has contributed to the relatively low incidence of gender studies in Germany. In the end, however, the promotion of the subject is always dependent on the initiatives of individuals. The motivation for it has always remained confined to relatively few female academics and a very small number of men. Finally, although the integration of women's and gender studies in cultural-study inquiry has in no way diminished the effectiveness of their academic investigations, the explicit nature of gender orientation has sometimes been obscured. I should therefore like first to give a brief overview of the institutions offering opportunities for

gender studies at German universities, and then outline recent developments in the academic understanding of this research area.

1. The institutionalization of gender studies: initiation, coordination, and presentation of research and teaching

3 The introduction of women's studies in German universities in the 1970s, arising in the first instance out of the women's movement, resulted in considerable activity in research and teaching. From its beginning women's studies and later gender studies have met with overt or covert resistance. Even today, serious research in this field does not have the reputation of helping in one's career. There are various sources of information dealing with the relevant research. They can be specifically accessed via the home page of the particular university. A comprehensive information service is provided by Bonn University, the *Center of Excellence Women and Science (CEWS)*, which gives an up-to-date report on, amongst other things, the situation in universities, research centres, women's and gender studies research, grants, conferences, and also academic policy, equal opportunities policy, and appointments. An annotated list of relevant university centres can be found in von Braun/Stephan eds 2000: 347-374. In addition the network of personal contacts between participating academics serves as a selective source of information. The following survey provides a representative selection only.

1.1. Central institutions at universities

4 Central institutions for women's and gender studies were set up at a number of universities through the initiatives of individual women, who were often able to exploit the pressure on society of political correctness in order to have their projects accepted. The financial means of these institutions are extremely limited. Some of them see their main task as providing a service and coordinating activities in research and teaching at their own university. An example is the *Cornelia Goethe Centrum für Frauenstudien und Erforschung der Geschlechterverhältnisse* [Cornelia Goethe centre for women's studies and research into gender topics] at the Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main (*Cornelia Goethe Centrum*), which has also been running a postgraduate program since 1999. The selective cooperation is confined to a limited number of subjects which are prepared to participate in workshops, series of lectures or conferences. Other centres have extended their coordination into a network of universities, for example the *Interdisziplinäre Frauenforschungszentrum* [interdisciplinary centre for women's

studies research] at the University of Bielefeld ([IZG](#)). This centre offers a number of politico-scientific courses itself, but is concerned primarily with women's and gender studies research activity in the Federal State of North Rhine Westphalia. A regular journal provides information about gender-orientated chairs, teaching activities, conferences and research projects. The *Koodinationsstelle Frauenstudien und Frauenforschung* [coordinating centre for women's studies and research] at the University of Hamburg ([Zentrum GenderWissen](#)) links up eight Hamburg colleges and universities.

5 Other central institutions are more interested in the promotion of internal research and teaching in the form of workshops, conferences and exhibitions, such as the *Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung* [centre for interdisciplinary women's studies] at the Christian-Albrechts University in Kiel ([Gender and Diversity Studies](#)), which aims to investigate questions of theory. The *Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung Zif* [centre for interdisciplinary women's studies] at the Humboldt University in Berlin ([Zentrum für transdisziplinäre Geschlechterstudien](#)) has been particularly active. This centre has documented the findings of its courses and the organization and setting up of its own course of study, Gender Studies (established in 1997), in twenty-one detailed reports. The main emphasis here has been on interdisciplinary issues and philosophy of science.

1.2. Courses of study

6 In Germany it took a long time for independent gender-studies courses to be established, with more comprehensive instruction in gender-relevant knowledge. So far there are two of these. The interdisciplinary course of study at the Humboldt University in Berlin has existed since 1997, so that its first degrees can be expected fairly soon. Participating subject departments range from German and foreign literature, history and history of art, musicology, pedagogics and ethnology, to theology, philosophy and psychology, sociology, law, agriculture and medicine. Interdisciplinarity and a wider interest in gender studies are reinforced by the fact that lectures can be attended by both students of this course (between 120 and 140) and students of the other participating subjects (about 350).¹ A somewhat different kind of course, *Frauen- und Geschlechterstudien* [women's and gender studies], was set up in 1997 at the Carl von Ossietzky University in Oldenburg with twenty places ([Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Frauen- und](#)

¹ Spahn 2000:165 gives the numbers for the winter term 1999/2000 as 93 (major subject) and 53 (minor subject), with a total of 485.

[Genderforschung](#)). Because of its connection to social sciences with a number of gender-orientated chairs, this course places its main emphasis on sociology and social history, social psychology, social pedagogy and music pedagogy. Degrees in gender studies are only possible with mathematics, biology, physical education or textile science as minor subjects. Other courses of study are planned at the universities of Bochum, Bremen, Freiburg and Constance.

7 The very small number of gender-studies courses does not, however, reflect directly the extent to which gender-relevant themes are covered in academic teaching. This occurs mainly in the humanities and social sciences, and usually within the context of a wider topic. Whether such topics include gender-relevant material depends on the academic interests of the lecturers, and is therefore not precisely quantifiable. Not infrequently such courses are summarized and made accessible to the public in an information brochure by a university coordination centre, for example one responsible for women's issues, or by a central institute concerned with gender studies.

1.3. Postgraduate programs [Graduiertenkollegs]

8 Postgraduate programs which run for a limited number of years promote the research and teaching of qualified young female and male academics. A small number of selected doctoral candidates can work and qualify in an interdisciplinary way in special state-funded centres. Various subject departments participate, and the students receive a grant. One pioneering and very effective postgraduate program, which ran from 1992 to 2001, is *Geschlechterdifferenz und Literatur* [gender difference and literature] at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. The topics are covered in regular seminars, series of lectures, guest lectures and an annual symposium. They have included cultural memory, writing and the writing of literary history, different forms of theatre, genre-orientated gender critique (travel literature, criminal biography, the picaresque novel etc), subversive analysis of the gender situation, corporality, aesthetics, the symbolization process and the male and female gaze. The comparative analysis of literary texts has been the main focus. Discussion of current theory has been continued, and translated into cultural-study textual analysis. There are now ten volumes of a publication series documenting the findings. The postgraduate program *Geschlechterverhältnis und sozialer Wandel. Handlungsspielraum und Definitionsmacht von Frauen* [the gender situation and social change. Women's power to act and define themselves] was sociologically and politically orientated. It was a combined project of the universities of Dortmund, Bielefeld, Bochum and Essen ([Archiv](#)

Gender Graduiertenkolleg) and ran from 1993 to 1999. It dealt with generation-specific and class-specific problems, women's self-awareness and life structure, feminist criticism and problems of gender theory.

9 Other postgraduate programs have a wider thematic scope, and gender studies is not obviously recognizable as a part of their specifications. An example of this is the postgraduate program *Identität und Differenz* at the University of Trier (www.uni-trier.de/linsenho/graduierntenkolleg.htm), which was set up at the beginning of the year 2000. The very recently established postgraduate program *Kulturhermeneutik im Zeichen von Differenz und Transdifferenz* (cultural hermeneutics in the light of difference and transdifference) at the Friedrich Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg (Graduiertenkolleg) is particularly comprehensive and promises to provide considerable methodological insight. Here gender difference in its relation to other differences of a national, ethnic, religious and social nature, as well as overlapping and boundary-crossing, are to be investigated. At the same time the compatibility of older materialistic cultural-scientific approaches with poststructural ideas are to be discussed.² Particular emphasis is placed on investigation into the literatures of various ethnic groups, popular literature and the media, as well as cultural institutions.

1.4. Research projects

10 Whereas postgraduate programs can combine research and teaching at a high level, the focus in research projects is clearly on research activity, with the opportunity for the team to share their findings. This does not exclude the possibility for individual members to engage in teaching outside their project. The focus on research enables participants to concentrate on their own topic of investigation. Here also, gender issues may either be integrated into a wider context, or form the central interest of research.

11 The research group with the theme *Umordnung der Dinge. Kulturwissenschaftliche Untersuchungen sozialer und ästhetischer Ordnungen* [the rearrangement of things. Cultural-scientific investigations into social and aesthetic arrangements], which was set up at the University of Paderborn in 1996, deals with the cultural coding of objects. In addition the gender allocation of everyday objects (jewellery is associated with femininity, coins with masculinity) as well as the provocative thematisation of gender reference in works of art. The research project

² See Doris Feldmann's information on the English department's participation in the postgraduate program on their home page of this postgraduate program.

Marginalität und Grenzüberschreitung in der englischen Moderne (ca. 1910 - 1940) aus der Sicht der Geschlechterforschung [marginality and boundary-crossing in English Modernism from the point of view of gender research] at the English department of the University of Cologne is concerned solely with gender issues, and has been supported financially by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* [German Research Board] since December 2000. It investigates changes in the concept of gender and in gender patterns in an era of radical change, with special reference to the discussion of values. These are illustrated in meaning- signifying spatial ideas as well as publishing conditions and forms of disseminating such subversive values. The research project *Rhetorik der Weiblichkeit* (www.uni-muenster.de/DeutschePhilologie2/Rhetorica.htm) in the German Department of the University of Münster 1997 to 1999 was concerned with the rhetorical construction of femininity and gender conditions. This included power relations, female education, personification of female speech (the nymph Echo, Cassandra, Sirens etc.), the relation of body and voice and female self-representation.

2. From women's studies to gender studies

12 Women's studies developed into gender studies through the distinction between sex and gender on the one hand, and the influence of male feminism, men's studies, and gay and lesbian studies in the 1990s on the other. It coincided with a backlash in the public and, frequently, academic interest in feminism (Oakley 1997), although this parallel development does not necessarily imply a causal relationship between the two. The broadening of women's studies to include the consideration of both sexes in no way necessitates the neglect of historical or present-day women's issues, as has sometimes been feared. On the contrary, research and teaching have shown in practice that concern with interrelational gender issues and the power situation has generated a particular focus on discrimination against the female sex, or rather the gender identified as female. Gender studies provides an opportunity to become aware of the extent and influence of the ideologies of gender difference and fundamentally review the heterosexual matrix with its open or subtle oppression of women and (seldom recognized) disadvantaging of the "stronger sex". In addition gender studies has undermined the concept of gender dichotomy, introduced radical cultural criticism on the basis of interdisciplinarity, and formulated and addressed a number of new questions. Gender studies in Germany played a part in the process, making its own contribution to this international development.

2.1. From women's studies as an internal subject to an interdisciplinary study

13 The first steps towards a study of women's issues at universities were made through individual initiatives in the 1970s, mainly in the humanities and social sciences. Soon afterwards there was a demand for university chairs in women's studies. This implied both a wish for independence and the idea of interdisciplinarity, although the latter was as yet in its infancy. The organizational and methodological possibilities and limitations of an interdisciplinary approach were explored. Institutional resistance, though also experienced particularly in the USA and England, mostly led to the abandonment of the concept of specific university chairs in favour of an affiliation of interested disciplines. This manifested itself in shared lectures, workshops, postgraduate programs and, the ideal case, the setting up for the first time of an actual program, at the Humboldt University in Berlin four years ago.³ The participants remain attached to their original discipline and their own departments. The modular nature of the curriculum, which thereby becomes necessary, makes it possible to link up with foreign universities through the planned European credit transfer system.

14 The Munich postgraduate gender studies program also retained close links with the participating academic disciplines, within which doctoral plans were monitored and carried through. At the same time there was continuous interdisciplinary exchange between teachers and doctoral candidates in courses with a small number of students, which is documented in relevant essay collections. Interdisciplinarity is of course also guaranteed in those postgraduate programs where this subject is only one among many, such as the recently established *Kulturhermeneutik im Zeichen von Differenz und Transdifferenz* at the Friedrich Alexander University in Erlangen/Nuremberg. Interdisciplinarity can be practised both through discussion of a basic theme in conjunction with various subjects, and within one subject bringing in different discourses. For example, fictional texts may be analysed as well as texts from philosophy, aesthetics, architecture, law, and biology, etc. and can be seen in their relation to each other.

15 A particular advantage of retaining close links with academic disciplines in courses of study, including postgraduate programs, is that students are guaranteed a solid basic academic training, and qualified female academics can bring their respective subject-specific knowledge and methods to a fruitful interdisciplinary discussion. This leads to a wider spectrum of topics and findings, where the far-reaching relevance of the category of gender can be shown with

³ For a discussion of interdisciplinary links and their practical application in this course, see Katrin Schäfer 2000.

particular clarity. The variation in the methodological and thematic orientation of the different disciplines is not too great in the humanities and social sciences for them to be compatible. Poststructural epistemology has in any case led to a proximity, if not a convergence under the label of text-orientated cultural hermeneutics. This examines primarily semantic and symbolic processes in literature and art, language and media, and history and society, which can also be evaluated from psychoanalytical, philosophical and pedagogical points of view.⁴ Cultural-study interests today form an important common denominator for the separate academic disciplines, and a particular problem can thus be examined within the areas of literature, art, social behaviour and value judgements. The perspective of culture, its acquisition and formation by its members, its subject-dependence and great variety of media, are all subject to investigation. Gender issues are now accepted within the canon of cultural-study concerns, and so gender studies can also occasionally be found on the agenda of cultural-study research projects. Within the framework of the constructive nature of culture, and the necessity of a critical deconstruction of symbolization constraints, a socially contextualized examination of gender issues can take place.

16 At the same time the necessary interdisciplinarity of a cultural-study procedure makes possible an investigation of gender issues from various viewpoints, within different problem areas and with reference to several discourses. For example, thematic fields such as corporality, masquerade and role-reversal in various national literatures and on various literary levels, in the theatre or cinema, in past or the present can be investigated as well as interpreted from a historical, linguistic, psychoanalytical, theological, socio-historical, medical, statistical or legal point of view. There are a number of essay collections which document some impressive findings of research into gender issues in various topic areas.⁵

17 The way individual academic disciplines take part in gender studies has of course been and remains very varied. In the humanities and social sciences gender studies was seen as being full of potential, and in certain fields it became an integral component with concrete, subject-specific findings and occasionally also with methodological modifications. The participation of women in the shaping of society and culture, and the formative influence of and change in the status of the sexes, was thus demonstrated. For the natural sciences on the other hand, the gender-critical perspective above all brought ideological, scientific and epistemological insights. For

⁴ Gender stereotypes can be interpreted as projections, toys examined for their pedagogical implications. The satisfaction of emotional needs in popular literature, myths or advertising can be demonstrated.

⁵ See for example Bußmann/Hof eds 1995; Ecker ed. 1997; Braun/Stephan eds. 2000; Ecker ed. 2000; Hahn e.a. eds. 2000.

example, ideological-critical studies revealed the existence of gender stereotypes in supposedly objective medical findings (Edler 2000), and the so-called purely biological definition of gender was tested against its artificial, socially variable components (Beier 2000). More fundamental critical studies took a relative point of view, as for example in biology where the concept of the female reproductive function was seen in relation to the imposed hierarchy in nature and culture due to patriarchal projection. In medicine, the reduction of the female body to an object and a function was exposed as patriarchal power-mongering. The validity of the scientific principles of rationality, objectivity and universality was called into question (Scheich 2000; Mathes 2000). Altogether the cultural and historical basis of a number of totally "objective" and absolute scientific findings became clear, although this was certainly not always accepted. At the same time the critical approach to scientific concepts of social phenomena such as birth control, eugenics or technological progress caused the relevant discourses to be included in the humanities in a more fundamental way. Gender studies is not confined to the evaluation of literary theory, art theory and philosophical texts, but rather completes the picture presented by medical and scientific discourses, namely that ideas of gender are determined by culture.

18 A key role in gender studies has been played by psychoanalysis. Its far-reaching theoretical and conceptual significance for gender studies stretches from Lacan's and Kristeva's theories about the philosophy of language and psychological development, via a cultural-critical reconceptualization of femininity and masculinity (Chodorov 1978, German 1985; Rohde-Dachser 1992), right through to its development as an apparatus for textual hermeneutics. The particular focus here has been on the use of symbols with psychoanalytical relevance, the analysis of imaginative and metaphorical processes which have a preverbally subversive content,⁶ as well as on unconscious psychological processes as experienced by fictional characters. A more pragmatic but no less important role within interdisciplinary concerns with gender problems has been that of American and English studies in Germany. They have played an invaluable part in disseminating the ideas and theories emanating primarily from the USA and England, a task which they still should take more seriously.

⁶ The theoretical starting-point here is Julia Kristeva's distinction between the semiotic and symbolic mode, which assumes that pre-verbal and non-verbal experience has an effect on language and culture outside of one's sexual determination.

2.2. From a revision of gender concepts to cultural criticism

19 As the organization of women's and gender studies expanded, following the establishing of subject-specific interdisciplinary links, there was at the same time a widening of interest in the subject and its methods. The critical approach to stereotypes of femininity and masculinity and their concomitant hierarchical nature brought with it the beginnings of a revision of the concept of gender from the historical, sociological and psychological viewpoints and provoked a search for new directions in literature and the arts. This new orientation did not only highlight the relevance of gender issues for the society at large but also made it a possible starting-point for a more extended cultural criticism, to include for example the relationship between nature and culture, the understanding of ethnic problems, and theories about subjects and identity. It is with such topics that gender studies is concerned, within the context of present-day cultural studies.

20 Two concrete examples serve to illustrate the cultural-critical dimension of gender studies. A central concern of women's studies was the revision of the literary canon. This led to both a rediscovery of the cultural contribution of a large number of suppressed female authors, and a gender-critical reexamination of texts which had already been studied by literary historians as well as those from non-literary sources.⁷ This initiated a dynamic new lease of life for literary history, which increased considerably the types and number of sources relevant to cultural history. In addition, the spectrum of criteria for judgement was thereby expanded beyond aesthetics and elitist tradition to include historical, cultural, psychological, media-sociological and politico-educational criteria. This expansion was something that the previous debate on popular literature and New Historicism alone would have been unable to achieve. Both the textual basis of projects in cultural studies and the type of inquiry have been extended. Another example is provided by Queer Studies which, initially concerned with male and female homosexuality (Gay Studies), developed into an open-minded investigation of the traditional dichotomies of heterosexual/homosexual, male/female, and other identity labels of essentialist origin (Jagose 1996). This prepared not only the way for new concepts of gender and sexual behaviour on the basis of a poststructuralist understanding of gender identity. The constructivity and historicity of other concepts, as gender assignments which have become an integral part of the naming and evaluation of everyday objects, spaces and types of behaviour, has also been made clear.

⁷ For gender-oriented histories of literature in Germany see: Brinker Gabler (1988), Gnüg/Möhrmann (second edition 1999), Schabert (1997). For a review of research in German literary studies see Keck (in print for 2002).

2.3. From gender dichotomy to differentiation by distinctive features

21 Gender difference was the starting-point for an investigation into the discrimination against the female sex, by now a public issue. The reassessment of this discrimination has also called into question the correlation of the male sex with one-sided and in some cases also damaging stereotypical features.⁸ The dichotomy of the sexes, always in the forefront of discussion, has been variously conceptualized and evaluated in the course of the development of women's and gender studies. In the debate about equality and difference, gender difference appeared as either the cause of a one-sided exercise of power and discrimination or as the occasion for pointing out specific feminine qualities. The discussion of gender difference changed from a critical view of biologism, via a socio-stereotypical and image-semiotic analysis (images of women, images of men), to the demonstration of a strict dependence on discourse and its modification through the linking back to a material and physical dimension.⁹

22 This transition from a socio-historical and socio-critical treatment of gender issues to interdisciplinary cultural hermeneutics, turning away from essentialism, brought about a deconstruction of the gender dichotomy in two ways. First, dichotomy was shown to be purely a thought pattern, thereby making possible a more flexible use of gender dichotomies. Second, the deconstructivist semiotic approach brought with it the recognition that the feminine element, released from the physical nature and historicity of woman, fulfils a multifarious representative function (Bronfen 1995). Separated from defined subjects, so-called feminine or masculine tendencies in images, concepts, texts, behaviour and cultural notions can be discovered and opened up for discussion.

23 The complex German term "Heimat" [homeland] for example, is associated with numerous social ideas, longings, ideologies and activities and has strong emotional overtones. It serves as a mythical model for the return to the womb, an escape into fantasies of merging, an incarnation of the mother, lover and wife for the soldier at the front, and a place of peace and freedom from conflict. The idealization of the female, characteristic of male projections, again underlines the female representative function of the term "Heimat" (Ecker 1997). Towns and cities have male or female connotations (Schaff 1999), objects tend to have male or female

⁸ This problem was taken up by Men's Studies which despite their limited scope had a strong impact on the development of women's studies into gender studies.

⁹ Different views have been given by Butler (1993) and Grosz (1994). The German debate on discursiveness and corporality of the subject has been summarized and reviewed by Stephan 2000.

functions (Ecker 2000), and the perception and portrayal of landscapes imply male or female qualities (Pratt 1992: 201-227).

24 The recognition of a cultural-semiotic autonomy of femaleness and maleness as repositories of wishes and values confirms the domination of traditional gender stereotypes. At the same time, however, it releases them from their gender-specific subject relation, emphasizing the fund of features that are available. In travel texts, for instance, so-called male or female features in depiction and behaviours cannot be attributed simply to the biology and identity of the travelling subject. This cultural-hermeneutic conception of sexuality also draws attention to "masculine" modes of textual depiction such as logic and functionality, or features with "feminine" connotations such as vivid description and sensuousness, ignoring the person of the (male or female) author. As to subjects, the fluidity of distinctive gender features opens our eyes to textual subjects in expository texts and novels¹⁰ which impede or prevent a strict classification according to "male" or "female". A similar testing of male and female behaviours where gender is not defined through tradition, culture or even biology, also takes place in society. This ranges from role-reversal and cross-dressing to a rejection of (enforced) heterosexual relations and an acceptance of transvestism and gender reassignment. Primary gender coding has to be "rethought- as a dynamic area of different features where many positions overlap and are temporarily reconstituted."¹¹

2.4. New fields of investigation

25 The elimination of the concept of the dichotomy of gender - leaving much to be desired in its translation into social action - and the interdisciplinary and cultural orientation of gender studies, have made it possible to deal with the central themes of women's and gender studies from new angles, with striking results, as well as to introduce new topics. For example, in the 70s and 80s the theme of corporality involved the perception of a woman's body as part of her identity and as the scene of her conflicts, as well as the discovery of specifically female sensuality. On the other hand, in the semiotic and discursive-theoretical school of gender studies, the body was seen and studied as signifier of gender ideologies, power games¹² and cultural memory. The search for texts and pictures in which gender conventions were broken, either subversively, openly or more

¹⁰ See for example novels in which the protagonist's sex is not obvious, such as Brigid Brophy's *In Transit* (1969), Maureen Duffy's *Love Child* (1971), Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* (1992).

¹¹ Kati Röttger and Heike Paul eds 1999: 21.

¹² This discussion derived mainly from the works of Judith Butler.

recently also provocatively, drew attention to the longstanding uneasiness regarding gender problems. The body, semantically of such fundamental, sexual importance was discovered to be part of the cultural memory. Thus, for example cultural patterns of body perception and presentation are handed down and modified through movements in dance and drama.¹³ The (semiotically based) capacity for modifying body images is also evident in the field of fashion and disguise, where sexuality can be created and stage-managed (Lehnert 1994, 1997; Bettinger/Funk eds. 1995). The performative dimension of gender ranges from attestation, via subversive questioning, to protest against conventions. Gender-orientated cultural studies have revealed numerous forms of gender-boundary crossing in both the past and the present.

26 The theme of language has also been significantly expanded. First of all it was examined from the point of view of its patriarchal aspects (Lacan) and the influence of pre-oedipal freedom (Kristeva), as well as from the perspective of feminine aesthetics. The poststructural approach to the traditional representative function of language made it possible to examine its plurality of meaning beyond its referential character, making possible a clearer perception of the linguistic exercise of power and fantasy in texts. With regard to cultural memory, the gender connotation of the "verbal" medium (unpredictable and irrational, but thereby also dynamic and creative, and acoustically sensuous) and the "written" medium (abstraction, logic, soundlessness) was discovered. The development of these two cultural media in different directions has been seen in conjunction with the development of the gender dichotomy (von Braun 2000). Rhetoric, with its gender-relevant character and influence without reference to the biological gender of its author, has become an increasing point of focus.¹⁴ Rhetoric involves both gender-reinforcing forms of linguistic presentation and subversive ambiguities and blueprints for the future. A further theme taken up by more recent gender studies, following the lead of cultural studies, is the question of subject and identity. The constructivity and variability of this theme opens up new possibilities for the concept of gender, and quite apart from a now almost undefinable subject, ascribes gender to the discourses alone.

3. Summary

Women's and gender studies took far longer to become established in Germany than in Anglo-Saxon countries. They are constantly in need of new organizational initiatives, especially as their

¹³ See several contributions in Claudia Öhlschläger/Birgit Wiens eds 1997.

¹⁴ This is the subject of the above-mentioned research project *Rhetorik der Weiblichkeit* [rhetoric of femininity].

connection with academic institutions is often of limited duration. Gender studies is not an independent subject area, but functions within an interdisciplinary context. The disadvantage of this is that gender studies has less university prestige, but on the other hand it has a greater academic effect. Altogether, the large number of relevant research and teaching activities and the comparatively few institutionally centred programs have had considerable influence. What can however be problematic is the necessarily varied level of competence of the participants, as a fruitful and successful implementation of gender studies demands a thorough training in the relevant theory and knowledge. A further problem is the relation between research and teaching. In a few centres at present, highly-qualified research is being undertaken, published and discussed in academic circles. The conversion of these findings into teaching is not very common, however. Here we have to question the social effects of revolutionary ideas emanating from a field of research which not only goes back to a socio-political movement but is still developing concepts that have enormous relevance for the critique of our civilization.

Works Cited

Braun, Christina von/Inge Stephan (eds.). 2000. *Gender Studien. Eine Einführung*. Stuttgart: Metzler.

Braun, Christina von. 2000. "Gender, Geschlecht und Geschichte." In: Christina von Braun/Inge Stephan (eds.). 2000, 16 - 57.

Beier, Klaus Michael. 2000. "Sexualwissenschaft und Interdisziplinarität: Zum biopsychosozialen Verständnis menschlicher Geschlechtlichkeit." In: Daphne Hahn et.al. (eds.). *Körper und Geschlecht*. 45 - 57.

Bettinger, Elfi/Julia Funk (eds.). 1995. *Maskeraden. Geschlechterdifferenz in der literarischen Inszenierung*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt.

Brinker-Gabler, Gisela. 1988. *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*. München: Beck.

Bronfen, Elisabeth. 1995. "Weiblichkeit und Repräsentation - aus der Perspektive von Semiotik, Ästhetik und Psychoanalyse." In: Bußmann/Hof (eds.). 408 - 445.

Bußmann, Hadumod/Renate Hof (eds.). 1995. *Genus. Zur Geschlechterdifferenz in den Kulturwissenschaften*. Stuttgart: Kröner.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

_____. 1993. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York: Routledge.

Chodorov, Nancy. 1978. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Deutsch 1985: *Das Erbe der Mütter. Psychoanalyse und Soziologie der Geschlechter*. München: Frauenoffensive.

Ecker, Gisela (ed.). 1997. *Kein Land in Sicht. Heimat - weiblich?* München: Wilhelm Fink.
Insbes. Einleitung S. 7 - 31.

Ecker, Gisela (ed.). 2000. *UmOrdnung der Dinge*. Königstein: Ulrike Helmer Verlag.

Edler, Daniela. 2000. "Geschlechtsstereotypen in medizinischen Lehrbüchern." In: Daphne Hahn et.al. (eds.). *Körper und Geschlecht*. 95 - 104.

Gnüg, Hiltrud/Renate Möhrmann (eds.). 1999. *Frauen Literaturgeschichte. Schreibende Frauen vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart. 2. vollständig neu bearbeitete und erweiterte Auflage*. Stuttgart: Metzler.

Grosz, Elizabeth. 1994. *Volatile Bodies. Toward a Corporal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hahn, Daphne et.al. (eds.). 2000. *Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung. Bulletin Nr. 20. Körper und Geschlecht. Beiträge aus medizinischer, kultur- und sozialwissenschaftlicher Perspektive*. Herausgegeben von der Geschäftsstelle des Zentrums an der Humboldt-Universität Berlin.

Jagose, Annamarie. 1996. *Queer Theory. An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press.

Keck, Annette/Günter Manulea. "Weibliche Autorschaft und Literaturgeschichte: Ein Forschungsbericht." In: *Internationales Archiv der Sozialgeschichte der Literatur*. 2002 (in print).

Lehnert, Gertrud. 1994. *Maskeraden und Metamorphosen. Als Männer verkleidete Frauen in der Literatur*. Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann.

_____. 1997. *Wenn Frauen Männerkleider tragen. Geschlecht und Maskerade in Literatur und Geschichte*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.

Mathes, Bettina. 2000. "Die Konstruktion des Körpers in der Naturwissenschaft. (Bericht über das ZiF-Kolloquium am 12. 11.99)." In: (ed.). Daphne Hahn. *Körper und Geschlecht*. 42- 44.

Oakley, Ann/Juliet Mitchell (eds.). 1997. *Who's Afraid of Feminism? Seeing Through the Backlash*. London: Penguin.

Öhlschläger, Claudia/Birgit Wiens (eds.). 1997. *Körper - Gedächtnis - Schrift. Der Körper als Medium kultureller Erinnerung*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt.

Pratt, Mary Louise. 1992. *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.

Röttger, Kati/Heike Paul (eds.). 1999. *Differenzen in der Geschlechterdifferenz. Differences within Gender Studies. Aktuelle Perspektiven der Geschlechterforschung*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag.

Rohde-Dachser, Christa. 1992. *Expedition in den dunklen Kontinent. Weiblichkeit im Diskurs der Psychoanalyse*. Berlin: Springer.

Schabert, Ina. 1997. *Englische Literaturgeschichte. Eine neue Darstellung aus der Sicht der Geschlechterforschung*. Stuttgart: Kröner.

Schäfggen, Katrin. 2000. "Neues aus dem Studiengang Geschlechterstudien/Gender Studies." In: *Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung. Bulletin Nr. 21. Studierende studieren Gender. Gender in Practice*. Hg. Geschäftsstelle des Zentrums für interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. 158 - 163.

Schaff, Barbara. 1999. "Gendered Cities. Italienische Städte im Blick britischer Reisender." In: Andreas Mahler (ed.). *Stadt-Bilder. Allegorie, Mimesis, Imagination*. Heidelberg: C. Winter. 173 - 196.

Scheich, Elvira. 2000. In: von Braun u. Stephan (eds.). 193 - 206.

Spahn, Anke. 2000. "Evaluation des Studiengangs 'Gender Studies' im Wintersemester 1999/2000 an der Humboldt Universität zu Berlin." In: *Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung. Bulletin Nr. 21. Studierende studieren Gender. Gender in Practice*. Hg. Geschäftsstelle des Zentrums für interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. 164 - 172.

Stephan, Inge. 2000. "Gender, Geschlecht und Theorie." In: Braun/Stephan (eds.). 58 - 96.

The Attack of the Fifty-Foot Women, or How (White, Anglo-American)

Feminism Went From Jouissance to Melancholy

By Victoria L. Smith, University of Cologne, Germany

Abstract:

Recognition of differences within feminism continues to produce charged and ambivalent relationships-particularly about the premises, foundations, and aims of feminism. These sorts of differences are sources of pain and pleasure-sites of ethical and erotic battle; yet, they are nevertheless profoundly productive." Prof. Smith's article engages itself with the current theoretical debates within Women's Studies from an American perspective.

1 In my first class of feminist theory in graduate school in 1985, Jane Marcus had us read (among many other things) Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which Is Not One*. In it I read the following sentences:

But woman has sex organs more or less everywhere. She finds pleasure almost everywhere . . . the geography of [woman's] pleasure is far more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is commonly imagined – in an imaginary rather too narrowly focused on sameness. "She" is indefinitely other in herself. That is doubtless why she is said to be whimsical, incomprehensible, agitated, capricious . . . not to mention her language, in which "she" sets off in all directions leaving "him" unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. (28-29)

I was amazed; I was delighted; here was a woman telling me I had pleasure spots all over my body (perhaps most importantly in my mind), that my pleasure and my language were complex (and connected), different from men's and certainly not heard correctly. All this on top of a witty and erudite demolition of Freud, Lacan and Western philosophy - we had read *Speculum of the Other Woman* the week before. No wonder I thought feminist theory was *cool*. Now, I admit that despite all the subsequent deconstruction of bodies and genders, charges of naive or willful essentialism, and dismissals of the white Euro-centric nature of French feminism that have passed I still find the desire (and critique) implied in those sentences - for pleasure, for bodies, for language, for difference - compelling.¹ That is so partly because of the yoked, but oppositional drives that produce feminism. As Teresa de Lauretis suggests, feminism is motivated, on one hand, by an erotic, narcissistic drive that wants difference, rebellion, daring, excess, and subversion and, on the other hand, an ethical

¹ As Hanssen puts it: "there doesn't need to exist a contradiction between, first acknowledging that the critique of French feminist theory's localism, classism, or luxurious literariness is justified from the standpoint of global diversified communities and second, celebrating it as an extraordinarily creative, rich phase in the history of feminist theory" (72).

drive that works toward community, accountability, and entrustment ("Upping" 266).² So in the end I find feminist theory sexy precisely because of my pleasure in Irigaray and her analysis of knowledge/body/language systems *and* the subsequent critiques of her work that ask me (and her) to be accountable for those pleasures and knowledges. I would maintain that these oppositional drives are what continues to animate feminism despite what some contemporary critics see as feminism's present crisis moment, a moment that, depending on the point of view, is either too full of the ethical drive or the erotic, narcissistic drive.³

2 In order to situate my reader in terms of feminism's current predicament I provide a short summary of recent appraisals of "what went/is wrong with feminism."⁴ I remind my reader, as she considers this list, that the road to hell, as my mother used to say, is paved with good intentions.

The Seven Steps to Hell: (order subject to change):

1. destruction of the unifying (for some folks) category of "woman"
2. institutionalization of women's studies (failing through success, I mean assimilation)
3. loss of political commitment/attention to the "real" of women's lives
4. impenetrable theoretical language (poststructuralism and its "purposeful" unintelligibility)
5. disappearance of joy/humor/eroticism connected with feminist scholarship (or who would want to be a feminist any more anyway?)
6. recognition of its historical constituency of white, middle-class, Western women (or we have met the enemy and she is us)
7. _____ (fill in favorite sin here - identity politics, post-modernism, French Feminism, Judith Butler, ungrateful and obstreperous daughters, controlling, old-fashioned mothers, gender studies, pro-sex radicals and /or anti-porn feminists, queer studies . . .)

3 According to some recent feminist accounts we have come to this gloomy moment from happier times. Feminism (particularly in its second-wave beginnings in the seventies)

² See for example Gubar's contention that many of the quarrels in feminist criticism result not from "healthy differences of opinion or vigorously competing methodologies but narcissistic posturing and myopic absorption in scholastic matters" ("Notations" 383).

³ The list of people who have marked feminism's crisis is a lengthy one; I name only a few: Modleski; Bordo; Elam and Wiegman; Hirsch and Keller; Looser and Kaplan; Benhabib, et al. See also the two *differences* special issues, *Women's Studies at the Edge* (Scott, ed.) and *More Gender Trouble* (Butler, ed.). Braidotti's interview/conversation with Butler is of special interest in *More Gender Trouble* insofar as it addresses different understandings of "sexual difference" theory and gender studies in both American and European contexts.

⁴ Although this list is a somewhat parodic account of the trouble with feminism, I want to stress that I nevertheless recognize the seriousness of the problems and the enormous amounts of intellectual and emotional energy that have gone into developing and refining these critiques.

was an intellectually exciting, erotically charged project where communities of feminists worked together to achieve concrete, recognizable goals in the name of women. For example, Biddy Martin longs for the days, "when 'love of women' and Women's Studies resonated with one another, [and] we seemed capable of eroticizing individual women's strengths, authority, even power, and of enjoying seduction without abandoning claims to justice." (355). And Jane Gallop says frankly, "I credit feminism with teaching me sexual pleasure. . . . For me feminism will always name the force which freed me to desire and to learn" (20-21). However, those times are (mostly) gone, these and other feminists go on to argue; instead they find the present state of feminism severely diminished - neither intellectually stimulating nor sexy nor even politically engaged. For Martin, the institutionalization of Women's Studies has produced a loss of "critical and intellectual vigor" (353), while for Wendy Brown, institutionalization was necessary but ultimately its own undoing, producing a loss of cachet, a loss of senior feminist scholars who no longer wish to be associated with Women's Studies, and a chasm between faculty and students in terms of knowledge and goals ("Impossibility").

4 Institutionalization, however, is only one of feminism's problems, for the institution itself is filled, according to various assessments, with careerists practicing intergenerational warfare.⁵ This notion of generations gives rise to troubling questions like Diane Elam's concerning feminism's trajectory in "Sisters are Doing It to Themselves": "Is feminism a *tradition* handed down by powerful ancestors, or is it a *progress* in which the latecomers, however dwarf-like, are always standing on the shoulders of those who came before, seeing farther, knowing more?" (56). One might note in this formulation the two drives at war in the internal dynamics of feminism - an ethics of respect and honor for the past versus a desire for new pleasure and knowledges. In addition to these dwarves and giants, other culprits within the institution include poststructuralist critics wielding theory-heavy (and jargon-ridden) clubs designed to smash the once unifying notion of "woman" to pieces, and feminists with "radicalized identity politics" who are obsessed with naming names and finding fault - particularly with white, heterosexual second-wave feminists.⁶ At least this is Susan Gubar's contention, and though a number of critics disagree with her conclusions - in particular Robyn Wiegman-critics of all stripes have been forced to come to terms with the impact of poststructuralist theory and of critiques of white, ethnocentrism on the feminist movement.⁷

⁵ See Looser and Kaplan's edited volume, *Generations*, for an extended meditation from feminists of all ages and professional standings, on generational conflict, the pressures of the institution, and a critical assessment of the paradigm of "generation" itself.

⁶ For a history of second wave feminism and essential essays, see Nicholson.

⁷ Perhaps one of the most enlightening discussions of the current state of feminism comes from the interchange between Gubar and Wiegman in *Critical Inquiry*. See also Wiegman's "Feminism's Apocalyptic Futures."

5 Other critics maintain that in addition to feminism's diminished intellectual, critical, and institutional vigor - it seems to have lost its lust for life - it has also lost its sense of political and public commitment. In a particularly hostile attack, Martha Nussbaum writes that the most insidious thing to happen to (academic) feminism is its "virtually complete turning from the material side of life, toward a type of verbal and symbolic politics that makes only the flimsiest of connections with the real situation of real women" (38). Indeed she sees "despair" and a "void" at the heart of this feminism.⁸ These lamentations for what has been lost, the need to recover, in Rosi Braidotti's phrase "the merrymaking of a movement that aims to change life" (*Nomadic* 167), present feminism as a diseased body - riddled with its own "fierce self-scrutiny" (Greene 17)- verging on suicide.

6 I recount this perhaps familiar melancholy narrative - a narrative that gives rise to what Wiegman describes as "post-exuberant despair"("Feminism"109) - in order to make some observations, perhaps interrupting various kinds of narratives - be they elegiac, utopian, apocalyptic or what have you. I suggest that the utopic past might be better figured as an absence rather than as a loss.⁹ In seeing a unified feminist past as absent (perhaps it wasn't really there like that) rather than lost we can avoid misplaced nostalgia as well as blame for those who somehow ruined and contaminated paradise and thus made "us" lose. Instead of endless melancholy where we remain incapable of working through what has happened, we can recognize the difference of the past from the present and simultaneously remember and take leave of it, allowing for critical assessment and a reinvestment in the present state of feminism. In this way, we can also move away from a rhetorical construction of feminist history where one moment (or wave) supersedes a previous one and instead conceive of a more continuous use of time where each moment had and still has productive meanings and value. We might, to rephrase Faulkner, (re)think of the feminist past as not dead or lost or even absent, as, in fact, not even past. Finally, in this effort, we might resist narratives of *either* progress *or* tradition.

7 Secondly and intimately connected to the above, I would submit that feminism is

⁸ Nussbaum's notorious attack was aimed at Judith Butler, whom she charges with participating in and producing a kind of "moral passivity" and with "collaborat[ing] with evil." Nussbaum suggests this is the case because she claims (rather astonishingly) that Butler is "adamantly opposed to normative notions such as human dignity." Nussbaum's attack garnered a number of rebuttals from such well-known feminists as Gayatri Spivak, Joan Scott, Drucilla Cornell, Nancy Frazer, Linda Nicolson, and Seyla Benhabib. Of particular interest here is Benhabib, who engaged in a lengthy and complex debate with Butler in *Feminist Contentions* over precisely the same sort of issues that Nussbaum brings up - questions of accountability, intentionally, normative goals, and self-determination. Needless to say, that debate between Benhabib and Butler was a much more nuanced and carefully argued discussion of values and methods within feminism. See also Wiegman for a thoughtful response to Nussbaum, as well as a discussion of the "idiom of failure" in assessing Women's Studies ("Feminism").

⁹ See LaCapra for a comprehensive examination of the differences between absence and loss.

currently engaged in precisely this sort of working through, that it is in a state of productive melancholia. The very articulation of the current "wrongs" of feminism - in particular its skepticism of the value of poststructuralist methods (and effects) in overturning the conventional and restrictive categories of women, sex and gender - is paradoxically producing a richly lucid conversation filled with change, pleasure and danger. Perhaps Freud is correct when he observes that melancholics seem to have a "keener eye for the truth" than those who are not. Indeed if one recalls Freud's understanding of melancholia, we might see that we are witnessing the reshaping of feminism's "ego." I say this because melancholia, for Freud, was not simply a pathological condition where a person loved and lost an object (which could be "a loved person or . . . some abstraction . . . such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on") and was left with a psychic "open wound" ("Mourning and Melancholia" 243).¹⁰ Rather, he claimed that the mechanisms of melancholia are intimately connected to the construction of the ego and subjectivity, for in response to loss or psychic deprivation, the ego identifies with the lost object so as to preserve it in some way. Thus, the ego sets up the lost object inside the self as a kind of compensation; indeed the ego *builds* itself by way of the lost object. I would suggest, then, that this sort of melancholic "remembering" is generative.¹¹ So we might conceive of feminism's ego to be building itself slowly and carefully through specific lamentations of what has been "lost." That is, we might conceive of feminism to be both keeping and letting go of (working through) past triumphs that were simultaneously proleptic cracks in its formation.

8 To posit an ego for feminism may at first seem strange, even inappropriate - for isn't feminism too diverse, too fragmented? Indeed, "we" are hardly a collectivity. Yet, there does seem to be a name, an object of desire (not to say subject) over which and through which various groups struggle. In this sense, then, feminism seems to me to constitute a kind of entity, capable of being read through psychical structures. Indeed, the current crisis of feminism lends itself to this reading insofar as its crisis (or working through) reveals its love/hate (hate because the object is lost or is absent) relationship with the very "objects" (i.e., people, values, methods) that created it - that is, with itself. Ambivalence seems the key to understanding the state of feminism, both its power and its conundrums.¹² And this returns me

¹⁰ Throughout this discussion of Freud and melancholy, I use the traditional and standard term "loss" rather than "absence" (as Freud himself does) in order not to confuse the reader. However, as I suggested earlier, the notion of absence rather than loss seems more appropriate for figuring feminism's past.

¹¹ See my "A Story beside(s) Itself" for a more detailed discussion of the productivity of melancholia for women.

¹² See Johnson for the idea that ambivalence is healthy for feminism. See also Juliet Mitchell's assertion that "postmodern feminism is a politics of relevant fragmentation" (12). As a politics of fragmentation and ambivalence, feminism necessarily produces conflict and contradiction and assures us of change and growth.

to my original formulation of feminism with its yoked but oppositional drives of eros and ethos. These are not simply two sides of the same coin of feminism; rather I would say that each fuels the other and without its partner, so to speak, the drive and feminism cease to exist. Indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that one drive doesn't stir without the other (to paraphrase another passage from Irigaray) - especially given that these drives are directed both outward - toward law, language, epistemology - and inward toward the changing structure of feminism with its own laws, languages and epistemologies. These drives, in varying degrees and ways, provide both "the critical negativity of [feminism's] theory and the affirmative positivity of its politics" (de Lauretis *Technologies* 26).

9 Before turning to my next point, it is perhaps necessary - insofar as feminism might be seen as a subset or outgrowth of left political movements - to note how my formulation of productive melancholy is unlike the melancholy rejected by Wendy Brown in her assessment of "new left melancholy." In that short essay, Brown draws on both Freud and Walter Benjamin in order to suggest the "Left" (she leaves the word unspecified in terms of its constituency) is attached more to ideals of the past or even to the failure of those ideals than to "seizing possibilities for radical change in the present" ("Resisting" 20). She sees the Left performing a kind of self-defeating fetishistic ritual with its own lost ideals. Brown goes on to describe the Left's conservative and backward looking glance at its own failures, a glance which highlights the "loss of a unified analysis and movement" and blames some of the same culprits that have fragmented feminism-identity politics and poststructuralism. While Brown's description of the Left certainly seems similar to the scenario that I have painted, I am less pessimistic about feminism's backward glance for it seems a way to orient and manage the present and to assure a future for feminism. Indeed Wiegman argues that feminism is "motivated less by an overwhelming sense of past loss than by a fear about the failure of the future" ("Feminism's " 807). She reads this anxiety about feminism's future as a "profoundly productive . . . aspect of academic feminism's contemporary knowledge formation . . . providing a way to think more carefully even creatively, about difference, disciplinarily, and the limitations of the present time" ("Feminism's" 815). Finally, then, in thinking about the present of feminism and what looking backward and forward might do, I differentiate between generative melancholy and a degenerative one and maintain that feminism is in the process of recounting "enabling" losses.

10 There is, however, one commonality between the Left as Brown describes it and the academic feminism of the story above - their whiteness. This racial constituency, however, remains unspoken in Brown's account (as it has in mine), implicit rather than explicit. Though

Brown stages her analysis partly through Stuart Hall's account of the crisis of the left (as outlined in *The Hard Road to Renewal*), it seems clear that a portion of the Left she refers to is precisely that which would be most threatened by an identity politics that stresses racial and ethnic differences rather than class - based solidarities - that is, white people. In the context of the narrative of feminism I presented above, if we rewrite the preceding sentence substituting "gender-based" for "class-based" solidarities, we get something like this: the feminists I named as lamenting and enumerating the current conflicts in feminism would be most threatened by an identity politics that stresses racial and ethnic differences rather than gender-based solidarities. An attentive reader would have recognized the feminists I named above - Gubar, Wiegman, Irigaray, Gallop, Braidotti, etc. - to be white. I point this out in order to mark their narratives as partial perspectives on feminism's past. One need only glance at early work by Audre Lorde, Michelle Wallace, Angela Davis, or those writers involved with *This Bridge Called My Back* - Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Barbara Smith, the Combahee River Collective, among others - to realize that a 70s vision of feminist unity did not exist for them. Or rather, to put it more precisely, while many of these feminists met together to share their concerns as women of color and achieved solidarity among themselves, they were largely excluded from the dominant, white feminist movement. This recognition of the blindspot of race for white feminism has produced two conflicting, yet complimentary sentiments: a disappointment in its own ethical failure to produce a more inclusive movement (we have met the enemy and she is us) and a desire to hold onto (and to celebrate) the positivity of the past in terms of effective uses of the concept of "woman" to bring about change.

11 This is of course not news; nevertheless this history and its legacy continue to affect relationships among feminists of all colors. Assessments by women of color of feminism's history and current problems tell a different tale than the laments outlined previously and tend to focus less on say, the loss of a unified subject for feminism - for obvious reasons. Contemporary women of color (usually of a younger generation than those listed above) who have looked back, particularly African American women, have been more concerned with invisibility (or its obverse, hyper-visibility), the silence surrounding black women's sexuality (especially by black women themselves), and the need to reclaim the female black body "which can be and is still used by others to discredit [black women] as producers of knowledge and as speaking subjects" (Hammonds 99).¹³ Their narratives tend to be more

¹³ See for example Williams; Valerie Smith; Crenshaw; Lubiano; Spillers; Alarcón; Chow; Saldivar-Hull; duCille; Carby; hooks; Morrison; Spivak; Giddings, to name only a few.

ambivalent and paradoxical insofar as the measure of exclusions both as women and as women of color are of a double nature. So, we might say that the melancholic narratives that women of color tell about feminism have an added and somewhat different set of losses, absences and sadnesses. It is clear, then, that the construction of the melancholic narrative of feminism enfolds within itself a kind of melancholy of race.

12 If there is a need for feminism on the one hand to work through (and within) the melancholy of race, there is also a need, on the other hand, to work through the dilemmas of poststructuralism - at least insofar as poststructuralism seems to have provoked many of the crisis items on my initial list of "what went wrong" with feminism. These two dilemmas are of course related; I will return to them below. Suffice it to say here, problems with poststructuralist theory have not gone unnoticed by feminists of all colors. Barbara Christian, for example, in her well-known 1987 essay, "The Race for Theory," condemns the take-over of literary studies by critics using obscurant Western philosophers and by critics who yearn for attention for themselves rather than attending to more deserving fictional texts written by women of color. She also attacks poststructuralist theory's mystifying language and asks in the end: "For whom are we doing what we are doing when we do literary theory?" (77). In other words, Christian echoes in her essay and her question some of the same concerns highlighted in my list-concerns about institutionalization, the use-value of theory, accessibility of language, and a connection to "real" people.¹⁴

13 That poststructuralist theory has been both fruitful and problematic for feminist theory is clear from Toril Moi's most recent book *What is a Woman?*, reassessing Simone de Beauvoir's work. In this new text Moi is working through (not always successfully) - that is, critically reassessing and remembering - some of the same vexed issues that have been faulted for bringing feminism to its deathbed and also, not incidentally, the very issues that have provided for feminism's ascendancy and critical purchase. I would like to offer a reading of Moi's book in part to support my initial declaration that feminist theory is still pleasurable (useful and flawed) after all these years and to show (hopefully) how to do things with pieces of the past that aren't really past in feminism - legacies, if you will. Moi is of course not an idle choice; her first book, *Textual/Sexual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* was also

¹⁴ We could also add here the destruction of enjoyment caused by reading some poststructuralism. Christian, who is not alone in her sentiments, writes, "I am appalled by the sheer ugliness of the language, its lack of clarity, its unnecessarily complicated sentence construction, its lack of pleasurable quality" (72). One could read this as simply theory basing, as I once did, when in the throes of too much fun reading Spivak. However, I have tempered my view. Theory does sometimes need complex language and sentence constructions that remain difficult to parse and in the end produce a meaning that is deliberately ambiguous. That does not mean, however, that every sentence must be obscure and bewildering, nor does it relieve its writer from the responsibility of precision and careful thought.

assigned for the same Marcus class where I read Irigaray. Perhaps I am also thinking through my own feminist past.

14 Moi's first book is perhaps best known for slamming Anglo-American feminist critics for their naive empiricism, attachment to a unified (female) subject, and an uncritical view of authorship.¹⁵ One might notice that the things Moi condemns in 1985 bear a striking resemblance to some things that were lamented as lost in my original "Seven Steps to Hell" list - a unified subject, a connection to the real. The irony of this will hopefully become apparent. *Textual/Sexual Politics* is also known for celebrating poststructuralism's - especially the French versions developed by Derrida, Foucault, Barthes and of course Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous - dismantling of humanism, with its attendant death of the author, assertion of the endless deferral of meaning and exposing of phallogocentrism. Despite what Moi's book has come to signify in American academic feminism, we should note that she sought in that text to produce a feminist materialist critique of both Anglo-American Feminism and French feminism (especially Cixous and Irigaray). Indeed, Moi assailed my then hero, Irigaray, as ahistorical and essentialist, and¹⁶ suggested she was a "patriarchal wolf in sheep's clothing" (146). Citing the same passage as I did in my opening paragraph, Moi dismisses Irigaray's notion of women's language difference ("womenspeak") as a "tale told by an idiot." Even in this brief sketch of the history of one text, we have ample evidence of feminism's oppositional pulls at work, a struggle that pits newfangled French poststructuralism against the achievements of (American) gynocriticism, a "younger" generation against an "older" one, and less overtly, white, straight conceptions of feminism against those of lesbians and/or women of color.¹⁷ I leave it to the reader to decide who to cast as narcissistic and who as ethical. What is of interest now - some 15 years later - is that Moi, in her effort to "work [her] way out from under poststructuralism" (xii), finds herself aligned with some of the same feminists she criticized in 1985 - Susan Gubar being a particularly vivid example. My point here is that two bright women, with two very different investments in theory and writing (though perhaps not in feminism), have arrived at similar conclusions about what ails feminist criticism - particularly in terms of the obfuscating language of some poststructuralist theory

¹⁵ These Anglo-American critics include Elaine Showalter, Kate Millet, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Annette Kolodny, Myra Jehlen, and others.

¹⁶ For a particularly insightful reading of Moi's failures especially in terms of her inability to read race as she seeks to valorize poststructural textual politics, see Chow.

¹⁷ There is virtually no mention of lesbian and/or black women's writings. This is Moi's reasoning: "[*Sexual/Textual Politics*] purports to deal with the theoretical aspects of feminist criticism. So far, lesbian and/or black feminist criticism have presented exactly the same *methodological* and *theoretical* problems as the rest of Anglo-American criticism" (86). With that the subject is closed for Moi.

and the axiomatic nature of its conclusions.¹⁸

15 The major element in Moi's new work is her steadfast belief that Beauvoir has much to offer feminist theory. Moi insists that we need to revise and revisit feminist theoretical and methodological projects in terms of their political and practical efficacy and she believes that Beauvoir is an especially good case in point. In *What is a Woman?*, Moi argues that Beauvoir's justly famous statement, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," has been misconstrued by a host of feminist theorists and indeed these misreadings have led to some of the current impasses in the thinking of sex and gender, problems that now have little to do with women per se. Instead sex/gender remain, if you will, theoretical stumping grounds - that is, locations where feminist theory remains stumped or puzzled. In asking us to reconsider Beauvoir's statement, Moi points us to the notion of the "lived body," an essential (though not essentializing) way to think of women (and men), and to Beauvoir's use of everyday examples and language to support complex theoretical ideas. Moi believes that this conception of the body and this way of writing/theorizing might be able to liberate the word woman from "the binary straitjacket that contemporary sex and gender theory imprisons it in" (ix). In a move that could be seen as embracing the ethical drive of feminism (insofar as it posits a need for commonality), Moi asserts that we need to be able to "say the word woman without having to blush and instantly mumble something about 'strategic essentialism'" (x). In looking at Moi's *What is a Woman?*, we recognize some of the fundamental conundrums of feminist theory, and here I return to the list I offered initially - issues of pleasure, bodies, foundational categories, clear language, and connections with the real.

16 The bulk of *What is a Woman?* reconsiders these problems in the context of what has been a fundamental concept in feminist theory - the distinction between sex and gender, that is, in traditional feminist terms, the idea that sex refers to a biological category and gender to a socially and culturally constructed one. This distinction has been essential in undermining the idea that biology produces "natural" social and sexual behavior (i.e., the foundations of essentialism and heterosexism). Moi looks at what has happened to this distinction since its initial academic feminist articulation by Gayle Rubin in her groundbreaking 1975 essay, "The Traffic in Woman," and its subsequent revision and dismantling by people like Judith Butler in her *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*. In rethinking the history of the concept of the sex/gender system, Moi asks us also to remember some fundamental questions in the practice of feminist theory: In what circumstances is a discussion of any particular distinction useful?

¹⁸ There are more similarities - especially the need for a way to disagree critically without resorting to *ad feminism* arguments.

What is the aim of deconstructing this concept? Are the goals met? How might the distinction or deconstruction of the distinction be meaningful in terms of the politics of everyday life? Her answer in terms of thinking about "what a woman is" (i.e. in terms of producing a theory of subjectivity) is clear: "the sex/gender distinction is woefully inadequate" (35). However, Moi does not simply dismiss poststructuralism, rather she asks might some other tools be more useful? She also acknowledges that recent poststructuralist delineations of the sex/gender system have produced "remarkable critiques of sexist ideology and misogynist abuse of power" (25); further, she credits Butler for her work in elucidating the mechanisms of heterosexism and homophobia and in giving voice to a number of gay and lesbian critics.¹⁹

17 However, despite its enormous (past) usefulness for feminist theory, Moi now questions the poststructuralist paradigm of the sex/gender system in terms of whether it has "produced concrete, historical understanding of what it means to be a woman (or a man) in a given society" (4-5). Moi recounts the following history. Rubin's initial distinction between sex and gender invited thinking about sex as a term outside of history and culture - that is, the split seemed to produce a kind of binary opposition, where sex (nature) acted as a ground to culture. This, of course, left the category of sex ripe for deconstructive critique. Poststructuralist feminists (Moi takes Butler and Donna Haraway to be representative examples) then showed the category of biological sex (hormones, chromosomes, etc.) to be as culturally constructed as gender; that is, to paraphrase Butler, sex was always already gender. In Moi's reading of Butler both sex and gender become products of the same discursive norms and so sex is no longer the ground of gender but the effect of it (46). In other words, the category of sex is a historically marked idea and hence not a fact but rather is itself produced by the category of gender. This has the result, Moi writes, of producing "woman" as a kind of "congealed ideological construct. For Butler a woman is gender and gender is simply an effect of an oppressive social power structure" (75). The problem with this conception, Moi argues, is that if we consider "biological sex differences an effect of 'regulatory practices' and picture such discourses as all-encompassing" then we produce just "as oppressive a theory of femininity as biological determinism." (29, fn 42). The body, in effect, has disappeared and sex has become a uselessly abstract category. This view of sex supports what she sees as the misguided idea that "as soon as the body acts, walks, and talks it becomes gender, that is to say an entity not produced by chromosomes, hormones, and so on" (26). Finally, she argues

¹⁹ In stressing what Moi credits, I want to make clear her difference from critics like Nussbaum, who attack poststructuralism for its failure to make an adequate political intervention in the lives of real women - the theory/praxis problem. This simplistic critique leaves unnoticed and unassessed feminist poststructuralism's ability to articulate the material and constitutive force of representation itself.

that these moves create a host of new theoretical problems - in particular how to conceptualize women's agency and subjectivity - "that poststructuralists feel compelled to resolve, but which no longer have any connection with bodies, sex, or gender. The result is work that reaches fantastic levels of abstraction without delivering the concrete, situated and material understanding of the body it leads us to expect" (31).

18 As an antidote to the obscuring "theoreticist" language and to the disconnection from the historical body that "loves, suffers and dies" of some poststructuralist thinking, Moi suggests a return to Beauvoir's concept that "the body is a situation" - an existential concept that was developed first through the phenomenology of Husserl and later Merleau-Ponty (and less through Sartre). It is a controversial and difficult idea which I will render here only in its outlines.²⁰ In part, what Moi wants to do, through a return to Beauvoir's "lived body," is to revive sexual difference as workable category - that is, not essentialized in either a discursive or a biological way, but yet acknowledges that being born with a male or female body will have specific yet unforeseeable consequences. Moi wants to make clear that the body "is subject at once to natural laws and to the human production of meaning and it cannot be reduced to either one of these elements" (69). We can read this as a kind of excess that escapes these binaries. The concept of the "lived body" foregrounds lived experience or "the way an individual makes sense of her situation and actions" (63) and in that sense the mind and the body are not separable. The body is seen as "ambiguous": it does not carry meaning on its surface, but neither is it simply a blank slate for discourse. So the situated body resists causality or any kind of determinism; it is neither involuntarily produced by biology (or psychology or discourse or whatever), nor is it voluntarily produced by any sort of agent, as in an "agent or cogito who somehow takes on or appropriates gender"; this is Butler's suggestion in *Gender Trouble* (8).²¹ Instead, the body, in actively taking on specific decisions, should not be conceived as acting out of free will. Rather, they are bodily postures or attitudes taken in specific situations. In other words, to return to the concept of woman, we can never really define what she is in a metaphysical sense; we must always return to specific bodies.

19 My somewhat long excursion into Moi's work was designed in part to show that

²⁰ The idea is controversial in that Moi reads against the grain of many understandings of Beauvoir; these readings see her as an essentialist - as conceptualizing woman as essentially different from man and a theorist, stuck in her white, bourgeois conception of the world, who simply wants access to the same agency as man. Braidotti, for example, writes: "Beauvoir sees the difference that woman embody as something that is as yet *unrepresented*. Beauvoir consequently concludes that this devalorized and misrepresented entity can and must be brought into representation" (160). Braidotti contrasts Beauvoir's position with someone like Irigaray, who evaluates women's otherness not merely as that which is not yet represented but as that which remains *unrepresentable* within this scheme of representations. (160).

²¹ For a discussion of Beauvoir's philosophy with regard to her understanding of the concept of the "lived body," see Bauer; Vintges.

feminism is forever re-arriving at answers, questions, concepts - particularly about what constitutes "woman" and indeed if anything should or can. This is not simply a compulsion to repeat - but an effort to repeat with a difference each time, addressing and revising what are the animating and/or toxic concepts that continue to worry feminism. In Moi's effort I find much to commend: her insistence that we be more careful readers of Beauvoir and her insistence that sex/gender theories "yield significant understanding of concrete cases" (115). Both suggestions offer good advice for feminist practices in general. I also applaud Moi's own effort to write about difficult ideas with clarity and precision. Finally, I admire her effort to reject dualisms of mind/body or culture/nature and her desire to use the concept of the "lived body" as a strategic term designed to upset the frameworks of binary pairs.²²

20 However, this return to the body is also problematic for me as well. We might summarize (and simplify) Moi's central point: what gets lost in the relentless conversation about sex/gender is paradoxically the body. Or to reframe this in terms of my melancholic narrative of feminism, for Moi, what feminist poststructuralism helped us lose or occlude is the "lived body." This is a loss of some proportions and one that is differentially distributed among different groups depending on their race, sexual orientation, class etc. How are we to understand the differential nature of reclaiming our losses, our "lived" bodies? I ask this not to reinstall some sort of hierarchy of losses - for example that losing the raced body is worse than (or not as bad as) losing the sexed body. Rather I am trying to mark the awkward and dissimilar returns to the lived body. For example, white women must contend with a legacy that cements woman within a body that is uniformly devalued for its weakness, unruly and uncontrollable impulses, hormonal irregularities and its paradigmatic difference from the (white, male) mind. African American women must contend with something quite other in taking back the lived body, especially given a legacy (among other things) of literally and figuratively disappeared bodies. Asking for our bodies back then is a perilous endeavor.²³ These different meanings and painful recoveries remain unexamined by Moi. And this is perhaps where her own melancholic working through remains incomplete. I would suggest that this is in part due to Moi's insistent focus on Butler's work - who in some sense because of feminism's obsession with her work (for good and ill) is dictating the terms through which

²² As Elizabeth Grosz argues, "the sexual specificity of the body and the ways sexual difference produces or effects truth, knowledge, justice, etc. has never been thought" (4). Grosz's book, while addressing Beauvoir only indirectly and Moi not at all, is an interesting study of how to rethink subjectivity in terms of bodies and sexual difference. It has chapters devoted to Merleau-Ponty as well as Irigaray, and extensive discussions of the usefulness of Deleuze and Guattari for feminist theory.

²³ For a number of interesting essays dealing with feminism and the body see Price and Shildrick.

we consider bodies and sexes and genders.²⁴ Moi ignores those critics, poststructuralist and otherwise, who have consistently made efforts to keep the (raced, classed, etc.) mind and body together.²⁵

21 I am thinking here in particular of a poststructuralist critic like Hortense Spillers - especially in her 1987 essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." I read this essay as an example of a stunning analysis of the situated body. In it Spillers offers a startling and radical return to the body - not an essentialized body - but a racialized, historicized and gendered female body. Spillers begins to mark out a sexual as well as a racial difference in the face of a traditionally masculine and racially uninflected psychoanalytic economy, an economy of *colorless sameness*. Spillers's analyzes the black female in slavery within an American context in order to arrive at, and to mark, the ground where the idea of a black female social subject might begin and where dominant psychoanalytic and feminist theories fail or need to be revised. Her work highlights the importance of discursive constructs as well as the need for understanding a particularized body. As she recounts her (re)search of the history of slavery - what she calls the "retrieval of mutilated female bodies" - she notes, "we might concede, at the very least, that sticks and bricks might break our bones, but words will most certainly *kill* us" (68). Spillers explores the way certain discourses name and position the black female, and in doing so construct a symbolic order - an order Spillers sees as a peculiarly "American grammar" (68). Spillers's work demonstrates the ultimate writing out of black women from the systems of representation and so parallels, for example, Irigaray's racially unmarked project of reading "woman" as an absence or "hole" in signifying economies of Western representation. I believe it is this complete writing out that leads Spillers to conclude that the slave trade to the New World involved a "theft of the body" - in literal and figurative senses - for the black woman that must still be reckoned with today. Indeed, Spillers believes that this "severing of the captive body from its motive will" forced a loss of gender difference, so that "the female and the male body [became] a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific" (67).

²⁴ This seems to be a problem not only for Moi but with much recent academic criticism in general. Butler has become the Poststructuralist Gender Diva who must be attacked.

²⁵ An example is Donna Haraway, whom Moi groups with Butler. Certainly to me these two theorists don't quite fit comfortably in the same poststructural basket, especially insofar as we recognize the immense utopian impulse in most of Haraway's work - see especially "Situated Knowledges." That is, while we can certainly see strains of racial constructionism in Haraway's work, she makes it clear that "we need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies are made, not in order to deny meaning and bodies, but in order to live in meanings and bodies that have a chance for a future" ("Situated" 187). In short, Haraway is dealing much more overtly with the ethics of feminism than Butler. Further, in her "Gender for a Marxist Dictionary," we must note that Haraway - long before Moi decided that she had to expose this - recognized the binary straightjacket at work in the conceptualization of the sex/gender system particularly in terms of the way it wrote race out of the picture - something that Moi consistently fails to see.

22 Spillers suggests that "before the 'body' there is 'flesh.'" That is, prior to the differentiation of subjects based on gender (in its most conventional sense), within the system of slavery there is an initial differentiation between subject and object, or in Spillers's terms, human and non-human. The crucial distinction between captive and liberated subject positions is that the captive is rendered a thing, an otherness, not subject to discursive distinctions that would specify sexual difference. Spillers sees this flesh as "vestibular" to culture-designating a site which stands before the entrance of white Western culture. Spillers argues that slavery transformed the black woman; she "became the principal point of passage between the human and the non-human world. Her issue became the focus of a cunning difference - visually, psychologically, ontologically - as the route by which the dominant male decided the distinction between humanity and 'other'" ("Interstices," 76). That is, the enslaved African woman became a conduit between two worlds, but "unspeakable," "unknowable," and "undecidable" in and of herself. However, while Spillers discusses two conflicting dichotomies - human/non-human and male human/female human, these two spheres interrupt each other even as Spillers posits them as separate. That is, claims of gender cannot be precisely separated out. She argues that the flesh/body distinction operates to differentiate human from non-human prior to gender or sexual differentiation, but she cannot maintain this distinction. The very notion of sexual dichotomy interrupts the notion of the flesh/body distinction at the moment of its formation to differentiate sexually the enslaved mother/woman/reproductive organ from the other flesh of the enslaved male. That is, enslaved African American woman becomes perversely (re)gendered. Sexual difference, gender, the body, and language take on vastly different configurations for the African American woman.

23 Spillers's recounting of the recovery of these lost bodies and the body trauma experienced by enslaved African American women brings me to a final observation about feminism's melancholic narrative. I would argue that it is precisely the discourses of melancholy, trauma and loss that are fueling some of the most interesting work in current feminist theory - work that necessarily bridges gaps between lived bodies and discursive production, the personal and the political, the theoretical and the practical, the margin and the center, white perspectives and those of people of color - a kind of working through that opens up empowering possibilities that are neither totalizing answers for the present and future nor some sort of redemption of the past but rather a creative/creating moment in the institutions and practices of feminism. Spillers's work is an early example of this sort of work, but there are other, more recent examples that illustrate the enormous versatility of these concepts in

terms of expanding boundaries of genre, articulating the necessary connections between the psychic and the social or, to put it another way, bridging a gap between theory and politics, reminding us to stay embodied (in terms of race, class, etc.) and examining the effects of being embodied. Some examples include Anne Anlin Cheng's *The Melancholy of Race* which provides an acute reading of the way melancholy functions in terms of race (and less overtly, how gender is imbricated in this racial melancholy) - for both people of color and whites in America.²⁶ Leigh Gilmore's discussion of the coincidence of trauma and self-representation in recent memoir production in *The Limits of Autobiography* provides another example of effective work using conceptions of trauma and loss for feminist theory. She suggests writing about trauma, particularly for those who have been disempowered by dominant constructions of the individual and the nation, stretches the boundaries of autobiography (and also the meaning of trauma) and offers a place to critique, for example, kinship systems, the legal system, and the class system.²⁷

24 The trend in recent accounts of feminism and in feminist criticism itself that I have discerned in this essay might be labeled the melancholy of difference. Recognition of differences within feminism continues to produce charged and ambivalent relationships - particularly about the premises, foundations, and aims of feminism. These sorts of differences are sources of pain and pleasure-sites of ethical and erotic battle; yet, they are nevertheless profoundly productive. These conflicts in feminism, then, reveal also a melancholy *with* a difference. For as feminism recognizes difference - whether this is an ethical, sexual, generational, racial, critical or some other difference - it generates an inventive, sometimes disturbing, working through. It is a sustaining melancholy that remains, necessarily, unfinished but a clear sign of a vibrant present.

²⁶ Cheng focuses primarily on the destructive, rather than the productive, aspects of melancholy as I did in my first section. As the reader might recall, the melancholic internalizes and identifies with a lost object. But this identification is not without costs. For though the object is kept within the ego, there remains an ambivalence; feelings of love and hate (hate because the object was taken away) are incorporated. Cheng uses this structure and maps it onto the American psyche. She suggests first that the racial other is the melancholic object for the dominant white psyche. She writes: "racialization in America may be said to operate through the institutional process of producing a dominant, standard, white national ideal, which is sustained by the exclusion - yet - retention of racialized others (10). This is so in the sense that dominant white identity in America operates melancholically by consuming the lost object, feeding on it. Yet the subject reviles that which he or she has introjected - the hate aspect of melancholy's deep ambivalence. So in a certain sense that object remains stuck in the national subject's throat. This process is an "elaborate identificatory system based on psychical and social consumption-and-denial (11). Cheng next moves this melancholic paradigm in the other direction toward the "racial other" (of dominant white America) and suggests that the raced subject is not only a melancholic object (that which is lost in the white imaginary) but also a melancholic subject insofar as the raced subject has introjected the raced self as lost as well. Thus the raced subject internalizes rejection and installs a scripted context of perception - where one perceives oneself to be invisible or lost.

²⁷ Other examples of recent critics using the concepts of melancholia, loss and trauma to produce insightful feminist criticism include Moglen; Cvetkovich; Robinson.

Works Cited

Alarcón, Norma. "The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism." *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*. Ed. Gloria Anzaldúa. San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1990. 356-69.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987.

Bauer, Nancy. "Beauvoir's First Philosophy, *The Second Sex*, and the Third Wave." *Labyrinth* 1.1 (1999). 16 August 2001.

Benhabib, Seyla and Judith Butler, et al. *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1995.

Braidotti, Rosi. "Feminism By Any Other Name." Interview with Judith Butler. *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6.2-3 (1994): 27-61.

_____. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.

Bronfen, Elizabeth and Misha Kavka, eds. *Feminist Consequences: Theory for the New Century*. New York: Columbia UP, 2001.

Brown, Wendy. "The Impossibility of Women's Studies." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 9.3 (1997): 79-90.

_____. "Resisting Left Melancholy." *Boundary 2* 26.3 (1999): 19-27.

Butler, Judith, ed. *More Gender Trouble: Feminism Meets Queer Theory*. Spec. issue of *differences : A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. 6.2-3 (1994).

_____. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge, 1993.

_____. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Carby, Hazel. "It Jus Be's Dat Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues." *Radical America* 20.4 (1986): 9-22.

_____. *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.

Cheng, Anne Anlin. *The Melancholy of Race*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

Christian, Barbara. "The Race for Theory." *Cultural Critique* 6 (1987): 51-63.

Chow, Rey. "When Whiteness Feminizes: Some Consequences of a Supplementary Logic." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11.3 (1999/2000): 138-68.

Combahee River Collective. "A Black Feminist Statement." Moraga and Anzaldúa 210-18.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color." *Critical Race Theory*. Ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, Kendall Thomas. New York: The New Press, 1995. 357-83.

Cvetkovich, Ann. *In the Archive of Lesbian Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and the Lesbian Public*, forthcoming.

Davis, Angela. *Women, Race and Class*. New York: Vintage, 1981.

de Lauretis, Teresa. *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1987.

_____. "Upping the Anti (sic) in Feminist Theory." Hirsch and Keller 255-70.

DuCille, Anne. *Skin Trade*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1996.

Elam, Diane. "Sisters Are Doing It to Themselves." Looser and Kaplan 55-68.

Elam, Diane; Dan Robyn Wiegman, eds. *Feminism Besides Itself*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. and ed. James Strachey. Vol. 14. London: Hogarth, 1914-16. 243-58.

Gallop, Jane. "Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment." Bronfen and Kavka 18-37.

Giddings, Paula. *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. New York: Bantam, 1984.

Gilmore, Leigh. *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*. New York: Cornell UP, 2000.

Greene, Gayle and Coppelka Kahn, eds. *Changing the Subject: The Making of Feminist Literary Criticism*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.

Gubar, Susan. "Notations in Media Res." *Critical Inquiry* 25.2 (1999): 380-96.

_____. "What Ails Feminist Criticism?" *Critical Inquiry* 24.4 (1998): 878- 902.

Hammonds, Evelyn M. "Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: The Problem of Silence." Price and Shildrick 93-104.

Hanssen, Beatrice. "Whatever Happened to Feminist Theory?" Bronfen and Kavka 58-98.

Haraway, Donna J. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14.3 (1988): 575-99.

_____. "Gender for a Marxist Dictionary: The Sexual Politics of a Word." *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*. New York: Routledge, 1991. 127-48.

Heinamaa, Sara. "What is a Woman? Butler and Beauvoir on the Foundations of the Sexual Difference." *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*. 12.1 (1997): 20-39.

Hirsch, Marianne and Evelyn Fox Keller , eds. *Conflicts in Feminism*. New York and London: Routledge, 1990.

hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press, 1984.

Hull, Gloria, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds. *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*. Old Westbury, N.Y.: Feminist Press, 1982.

Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.

_____. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.

Johnson, Barbara. *The Feminist Difference: Literature, Psychoanalysis, Race, and Gender*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1998.

Kavka, Misha. Introduction. Bronfen and Kavka. ix-xxvi.

LaCapra, Dominick. "Trauma Absence Loss." *Critical Inquiry* 25.4 (1999): 696- 727.

Looser, Devoney and E. Ann Kaplan, eds. *Generations: Academic Feminist in Dialogue*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984.

Lubiano, Wahneema. "Black Ladies, Welfare Queens, and State Minstrels: Ideological War by Narrative Means." *Morrison* 323-61.

Martin, Biddy. "Success and Its Failures." Bronfen and Kavka 353-380.

Mitchell, Juliet. "Psychoanalysis and Feminism at the Millennium." Bronfen and Kavka 3-17.

Modleski, Tania. *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age*. New York: Routledge: 1991.

Moi, Toril. *Sexual Textual Politics; Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Routledge, 1985.

_____. *What is a Woman? And Other Essays*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999.

Moglen, Helene. *The Trauma of Gender*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2001.

Moraga, Cherrie and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back. Writings by Radical Women of Color*. New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1981.

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992.

_____, ed. *Racing Justice, Engendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality*. New York: Pantheon, 1992.

Nicholson, Linda, ed. *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Nussbaum, Martha. "The Professor of Parody." *New Republic*, 220.16 (February 22 1999) 37-45.

Price, Janet and Margrit Shildrick, eds. *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*. New York: Routledge, 1999.

Reagon, Bernice Johnson. "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century." *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*. Ed. Barbara Smith. Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983. 356-68.

Robinson, Sally. *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis*. New York: Columbia UP, 2000.

Rubin, Gayle. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." *Toward an Anthology of Women*. Ed. Rayna Reiter. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975. 157-210.

Saldívar-Hull, Sonia. "Feminism on the Border: From Gender Politics to Geopolitics." *Criticism in the Borderlands: Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture, and Ideology*. Ed. Héctor Calderón and José David Saldívar. Durham: Duke UP, 1991. 203-20.

Scott, Joan. ed. *Women's Studies on the Edge: Spec. issue of differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 9.3 (1997).

Smith, Barbara. "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism." Hull, Scott, and Smith 157- 75.

Smith, Valerie. *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narratives*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987.

Smith, Victoria L. "A Story beside(s) Itself: The Language of Loss in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*." *PMLA* 114 (1999): 194-206.

Spillers, Hortense J. "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words." *Pleasure and Danger*. Ed. Carol Vance. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984. 73-100.

_____. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* (1987): 65-81.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Culture and Politics*. New York: Methuen, 1987.

Vintges, Kare. "Simone de Beauvoir: A Feminist Thinker for Our Times." *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 14.4 (1999): 133-45.

Wall, Cheryl, ed. *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory and Writing by Black Women*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1989.

Wallace, Michele. *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory*. London: Verso, 1990.

Wiegman, Robyn. "Feminism, Institutionalization and the Idiom of Failure." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11.3 (1999-2000): 107-36.

_____. "Feminism's Apocalyptic Futures." *New Literary History* 31 (2000): 805-25.

_____. "What Ails Feminist Criticism? A Second Opinion." *Critical Inquiry* 25.2 (1999): 262-79.

Key Issues in Postcolonial Feminism: A Western Perspective

By Chris Weedon, Cardiff University, UK

Abstract:

Third world women are making their voices heard and are beginning to change the face of feminism in the West. Postcolonial feminism in the new millennium now accepts a crucial point, long self-evident to Third World women, that racism, colonialism and its legacies are not just the province of non-white, non-Western women. Prof. Weedon's essay also deals with the concept of difference within gender theory as highlighted by the increasing contribution of Postcolonial studies to gender issues.

1 In 1984 Black American feminist Barbara Smith spoke warmly of being part of a Third World feminist movement: 'And not only am I talking about my sisters here in the United States-American Indian, Latina, Asian American, Arab American-I am also talking about women all over the globe. . . Third World feminism has enriched not just the women it applies to, but also political practice in general' (Smith 1984: 27). The struggle of Third World women-both in the West and in the developing world-for recognition by Western feminism has been long and hard. More often the silenced objects of Western analysis, Third World women are making their voices heard and are beginning to change the face of feminism in the West. Postcolonial feminism in the new millennium now accepts a crucial point, long self-evident to Third World women, that racism, colonialism and its legacies are not just the province of non-white, non-Western women.

2 The history of the West is, in large part, the history of its exploitation of its non-white, non-Western Others. Colonized countries have been profoundly affected by the exploitative, racist nature of this interrelation which was and remains economic, political and cultural. As current debates on the slave trade and the question of reparations illustrate, history is always with us. Although the Trans-Atlantic slave trade was abolished in the course of the Nineteenth Century, its legacies and those of colonial occupation can be seen in the inequalities and political and economic problems of formerly colonized countries. The question of responsibility for the past and what this means for the present was a constant theme at the United Nations global conference on racism held in South Africa in September 2001 and nowhere has this question demanded more attention in recent years than in Australia. Here Aboriginal people's struggle for recognition of their history since white settlement forms an integral part of the broader fight for human rights and equality and Aboriginal women are active in this fight, while at the same time urging white feminists to take these issues seriously (see, for example, Huggins 1998 and Morton-Robinson 2000). In Europe and North America,

the economic and political legacies of colonialism have radically changed the 'racial' and ethnic make up of societies, bringing with them problems of white ethnocentrism, ethnic conflict and racism that feminists must address.

3 As in the colonial period, the legacies of colonialism are invariably tied up with racism. In her novel *The Bluest Eye* (1981), Toni Morrison graphically depicts the effects of the legacy of nineteenth-century classical racism for poor black people in the United States. The novel tells of how the daughter of a poor black family, Pecola Breedlove, internalizes white standards of beauty to the point where she goes mad. Her fervent wish for blue eyes comes to stand for her wish to escape the poor, unloving, racist environment in which she lives. For a long time mainstream white Western feminism paid scant attention to the question of race. Racism was seen as secondary to patriarchy and, at best, the problem of non-white women. Many white women took a liberal, colour blind position which claimed not to see difference or act upon it. It took a long, hard struggle by black women to have racism included on the feminist agenda. One of the most poignant and powerful critiques of white complacency came in 1980 from the radical black lesbian feminist Audre Lorde: 'By and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word *sisterhood* that does not in fact exist' (Lorde 1984a: 116). The strong tendency of white women to disregard racism was an effect of white privilege-a point that women of colour were forced to make repeatedly:

As Third World women we clearly have a different relationship to racism than white women, but all of us are born into an environment where racism exists. Racism affects all of our lives, but it is only white women who can 'afford' to remain oblivious to these effects. The rest of us have had it breathing or bleeding down our necks. (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981: 62)

4 In recent years the question of whiteness has come to the fore in feminist debates on race and remains a key issue in postcolonial feminism (see, for example, Mohanram 1999). This is largely due to the impact of Black feminism on white feminists. Recognising the racialised nature of whiteness and the privilege that comes with it have proved difficult for white women, provoking responses such as disabling guilt rather than positive strategies that would involve relinquishing privilege. Because racism is so ingrained in Western societies-often taking non-conscious and institutionalised forms-anti-racist strategies require a working through, at an individual and personal level, of often unacknowledged assumptions, prejudices and practices. It means coming to terms with the contradictory nature of subjectivity, including individual women's often hidden complicity with oppression or

perpetuation of oppressive practices, As Cherrie Moraga argues:

Within the women's movement, the connections among women of different backgrounds and sexual orientations have been fragile, at best. I think this phenomenon is indicative of our failure to seriously address ourselves to some very frightening questions: How have I internalized my own oppression? How have I oppressed? Instead, we have let rhetoric do the job of poetry. Even the word 'oppression' has lost its power. We need a new language, better words that can more closely describe women's fear of and resistance to one another; words that will not always come out sounding like dogma. (Moraga 1981b: 30)

5 As Lorde suggested in her essay 'Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference' (1984a), the positive recognition of difference and diversity, so necessary to political advance, requires willingness to acknowledge the privileges which come from the structural power relations within which individuals are located. Gloria Anzaldúa explains the dangers of failing to acknowledge differences in relation to racialised positions:

Often white-feminists want to minimize racial difference by taking comfort in the fact that we are all women and/or lesbians and suffer similar sexual-gender oppressions. They are usually annoyed with the actuality (though not the concept) of 'differences', want to blur racial difference, want to smooth things out-they seem to want a complete, totalizing identity. Yet in their eager attempt to highlight similarities, they create or accentuate 'other' differences such as class. These unacknowledged or unarticulated differences further widen the gap between white and colored. (Anzaldúa 1990a: xxi)

6 The tendency to downplay differences has long been part of mainstream feminism. Indeed much advance in the position of women in the West rested on discourses of sameness and human rights. From its inception in the early 1700s, feminism in the modern West has consistently held universalist aspirations and feminists have argued for women's rights as human beings. In radical feminism since the early 1970s, women as a group, sharing fundamental oppressions produced by global patriarchy, have been the basis on which feminists have sought to ground political action (though, here too, there has been increasing attention paid to differences between women over recent years (see, for example, Bell & Klein 1996). The emphasizing of a common shared humanity remains a crucial political strategy within feminism and a movement which began by representing the interests of white, Western, middle-class, women has diversified to the point where human rights have been placed at the centre of the agenda for a global feminism. Reporting in *Signs* on the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, Charlotte Bunch and Susana Fried recount how the conference:

established clearly that women are a global force for the twenty-first century and that women's human rights are central to women's leadership for the future. Women's rights as human rights permeated debates and delegates speeches at the official UN

intergovernmental conference as well as at the parallel Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Forum held some thirty miles away in Huairon, where it was a palpable presence in many sessions. The combined effect of these activities was a groundswell of support for making the entire platform (for Action) an affirmation of the human rights of women, including women's rights to education, health, and freedom from violence, as well as to the exercise of citizenship in all its manifestations. (Bunch and Fried 1996: 200)

7 While the political importance of discourses of human rights and equality remains compelling, any adequate discourse of human rights must remain vigilant about its own partiality and limitations. Discourses of human rights for a long time excluded any one who was not white, male and middle class and affirmed particular meanings and values as universal. Excluded groups have had to fight for centuries for inclusion within the liberal humanist project of liberty and equality. The history of contemporary feminism has made clear how important it is to pay attention to difference even in the interests of achieving rights for all. This is a key theme, too, in recent Third World feminist writing which both challenges the Eurocentric gaze and urges the value of Third World feminist perspectives to a global feminism.

8 In acknowledging and acting upon differences that are hierarchically structured through racialised relations of power, white women need to avoid alienating and marginalising other women by objectifying them or speaking for them. This is particularly important where colonial relations are involved. Moraga argues, for example, that:

Some white people who take up multicultural and cultural plurality issues mean well but often they push to the fringes once more the very cultures and ethnic groups about whom they want to disseminate knowledge. For example, the white writing about Native peoples or cultures displaces the Native writer and often appropriates the culture instead of proliferating information about it. The difference between appropriation and proliferation is that the first steals and harms; the second helps heal breaches of knowledge. (Moraga 1981a: xxi)

9 The project of postcolonial feminism encompasses women in both the developing and developed world. Whereas the Eurocentric tendencies of women in the West lead them to see their societies and cultures as models for the rest of the world, Third World countries have their own active indigenous women's movements concerned with the specificities of their countries. Much of the feminist theory and scholarship produced by Third World women remains invisible in the West, though some feminists from the Third World who live in the West are increasingly making their voices heard. In addition to analysing their own situations, Third World women are articulating powerful critiques of the Eurocentrism of much Western feminism, its amnesia about colonial history and its tendency to reproduce colonial modes of

representation.

10 A knowledge of history is important to acknowledging and confronting Eurocentrism. To be without this knowledge is to be without the tools with which to understand how the present has been formed by the past. The development of a feminism which can take due account of the structural relations that constitute difference, must recognize the often brutal history of colonialism and its role in shaping the modern world. As Uma Narayan argues:

Colonial history is the terrain where the project of 'Western' culture's self-definition became a project heavily dependent upon its 'difference' from its 'Others' both internal and external. The contemporary self-definition of many Third-World cultures and communities are also in profound ways political responses to this history. Working together to develop a rich feminist account of this history that divides and connects us might well provide Western and Third-World feminists [with] some difficult but interesting common ground, and be a project that is crucial and central to any truly 'international' feminist politics. (Narayan 1997: 80)

11 Post-colonial feminists are still in the process of contesting the Eurocentric gaze that privileges Western notions of liberation and progress and portrays Third World women primarily as victims of ignorance and restrictive cultures and religions. This was a key focus of Chandra Mohanty's influential essay 'Under Western Eyes' (1991) which argues that much Western feminist writing about Third World women 'discursively colonize[s] the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular "third world woman"-an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse' (Mohanty 1991: 53). Mohanty points out how Third World women tend to be depicted as victims of male control and of traditional cultures. In these characterizations little attention is paid to history and difference. Rather Western feminism comes to function as the norm against which the Third World is judged. If Third World women's issues are analysed in detail within the precise social relations in which they occur, then more complex pictures emerge. Mohanty argues that Third World women, like Western women, are produced as subjects in historically and culturally specific ways by the societies in which they live and act as agents. Moreover they have both voice and agency. Writing of genital mutilation in the Sudan, Evelyne Accad, for example, explains how:

Women who have been subjected to circumcision or who had witnessed the worst form of excision-infibulation-done on relatives or friends, not only voiced their opinion against it, but they are involved in a wide campaign and actions aimed at struggling to eradicate the practice. The struggle they described to me seemed quite remarkable. They go to the countryside with programs of hygiene and development. They explain the connection between diseases and infibulation which the people have no effort in making. They stage plays and have radio programs to teach the people

about the disastrous consequences linked to the practice, and they also educate the midwives and lead them to other means of earning a living than performing these operations. (Accad 1996: 468)

This is a very different picture of Third World women's relation to genital mutilation than that found in the work of Western feminists, for example, Mary Daly's classic radical feminist text *Gyn/Ecology* (1979).

12 Uma Narayan (1997) makes similar points about colonial modes of representation in her critique of Daly's treatment of *sati*. Narayan argues that while Daly's work addresses Third World women's issues, 'it does so in a manner that misrepresents what is at stake' reproducing 'some common and problematic Western understandings of Third-World contexts and communities' (Narayan 1997: 45). In Narayan's view Daly fails to give due attention to social and historical details and to context. There is no attention to history in her work on Third World practices and, as a result of this, the Third World emerges as timeless and unchanging. Comparing Daly's accounts of *sati* and her account of European witch burning, Narayan points to the absence of historical information provided on *sati*. Moreover, Narayan argues, Daly pays no attention to questions of class, caste, religion or geographical location. The picture produced is too simple and monolithic, lacking internal differences and complexity.

13 Another key question in postcolonial feminism is who speaks for whom and whose voices are heard in discussions of Third World women's issues. The lack of voice given to Third World women remains a problem as does the failure of Western women to problematise the role of the West in the issues discussed. The question of voice was raised by Gayatri Spivak in her influential essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988) in which she analyses 'the relations between the discourses of the West and the possibility of speaking of (or for) the subaltern woman' (Spivak 1988: 271).

Reporting on, or better still, participating in, antisexist work among women of color or women in class oppression in the First World or the Third World is undeniably on the agenda. We should also welcome all the information retrieval in these silenced areas that is taking place in anthropology, political science, history and sociology. Yet the assumption and construction of a consciousness or subject sustains such work and will, in the long run, cohere with the work of imperialist-subject constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization. And the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever. (Spivak 1988: 295)

Although Spivak is profoundly pessimistic about the possibility of giving voice to the subaltern woman, she argues that Western women can do better. It is crucial, she suggests, not to make the commonplace mistake of assuming transparent objectivity on the part of the

researcher. Feminists need to engage with their subjects: 'In learning to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the postcolonial intellectual systematically unlearns female privilege. This systematic unlearning involves learning to critique postcolonial discourse with the best tools it can provide and not simply substituting the lost figure of the colonized' (295).

14 Difference as inequality is produced by economic, political, social and cultural factors. In the global context these include the division of the world into radically different economic zones characterised by extremes of wealth and poverty. Yet these relations of inequality are often reproduced within developed societies where non-white women most often find themselves at the bottom of the pile. Factors which produce difference as oppression include class, ethnocentric and racist practices, and heterosexism. Islamophobia, for example, is a real threat in Western Europe and the United States. The position in which women are located within any society often determines what they see as political problems. A key question for postcolonial feminism is how to go beyond the limitations that come from one's location in a particular place at a particular moment in history and the experience derived from this. This transcending of ethnocentrism requires effort-the effort to listen to others, to learn about the histories of other women and the social and cultural conditions within which they are placed. It requires what bell hooks calls 'strategies of communication and inclusion that allow for the successful enactment of this feminist vision', that is a vision that takes diversity seriously (hooks 1989: 24). For Western feminists it requires above all, reading and listening to what Third World women have to say.

15 In the Third World, indigenous feminist movements face their own political problems. Yet here too, the effects of Western discourses play a role. The tendency of Western feminism to see itself as feminism *per se*, and not to give due regard to indigenous movements is not unrelated to the tendency of those hostile to feminist movements in the Third World to characterize feminism as by definition Western. Writing of Indian feminism, Narayan shows how anti-feminist forces in India use the notion of Westernisation selectively to attack those aspects of modern Indian life and politics with which they disagree. Far from being an imitation of Western feminism, Narayan argues, Third World feminism is very much a response to local issues in Third World countries:

Issues that feminist groups in India have politically engaged with include problems of dowry-murder and dowry-related harassment of women; police rape of women in custody; issues relating to women's poverty, health and reproduction; and issue of ecology and communalism that affect women's lives. Indian feminist political activities clearly make feminists and feminism part of the *national political landscape* of many Third-World countries. I am arguing that Third-World feminism is not a

mindless mimicking of 'Western' agendas' in one clear and simple sense-that, for instance, Indian feminism is clearly a response to issues specifically confronting many Indian women. (Narayan 1997: 13)

In Narayan's view, Third World feminists need to challenge 'the larger pictures of Nation, National History, and Cultural Traditions . . . that conceal their own historicity and their own status as representations-suggesting that the nation and its culture are "natural givens" rather than the historical inventions and constructions that they are'(20-1). This important point is equally applicable to Western nations and, if taken seriously, might make a real contribution to understanding and contesting Western racism and ethnocentrism.

16 Thinking difference in new, non-oppressive ways is a key objective of postcolonial feminism, both in the West and in the Third World. This is linked to the political project of creating a global climate in which difference can be lived as enriching and valuable rather than as the oppressive effect of hierarchical binary oppositions. Some recent writing by Black and Third World women in the West has argued that the diasporic experience of women of Colour can create the conditions for breaking down traditional binary categories and liberating difference. This deconstruction of traditional binary oppositions is a move which also informs much postmodern culture. If respect for difference is one of the more positive aspirations of postmodernity, the challenging of boundaries is integral to this project. This is a perspective developed by Gloria Anzaldúa in her writing:

Theorists-of-color are in the process of trying to formulate 'marginal' theories that are partially outside and partially inside the Western frame of reference (if that is possible), theories that overlap many 'worlds.' We are articulating new positions in these 'in-between,' Borderland worlds of ethnic communities and academics, feminist and job worlds. In our literature, social issues such as race, class and sexual difference are intertwined with the narrative and poetic elements of a text, elements in which theory is embedded. In our *mestizaje* theories we create new categories for those of us left out or pushed out of the existing ones. We recover and examine non-Western aesthetics; recover and examine non-rational modes and 'blanked-out' realities while critiquing Western aesthetics; recover and examine non-rational modes and 'blanked-out' realities while critiquing rational, consensual reality; recover and examine indigenous languages while critiquing the 'languages' of the dominant culture. And we simultaneously combat the tokenization and appropriation of our literatures and our writers/artists. (Anzaldúa 1990a: xxvi)

The idea of a cultural hybridity that can challenge existing binary oppositions and hierarchies has become a popular one in postcolonial theory. It is seen by some women of Colour as a profound and empowering effect of diasporic experience. Thus Black British feminist Heidi Safia Mirza writes:

Cultural hybridity, the fusion of cultures and coming together of difference, the 'border crossing' that marks diasporic survival, signifies change, hope of newness, and space

for creativity. But in the search for rootedness-a 'place called home'- these women, in the process of self-identification, disidentify with an excluding, racist British colonizing culture. They articulate instead a multi-faceted discontinuous black identity that marks their difference. (Mirza, 1997: 16)

Yet while it is not only Black women who reject excluding, racist, colonizing cultures, white women, who *de facto* benefit from such exclusions, need to be more vocal in contesting them. They need to work to establish new forms of identity and ways of being, that are inclusive and that respect and celebrate difference.

17 One of the strengths of recent feminist thought is the possibilities that it offers for thinking difference differently. Much of this work is indebted to women of Colour in both the Third and First worlds. It has also benefited from the insights of poststructuralist theory and the debates that this theory has produced (for a full discussion of the issues involved see Weedon 1999). While the struggle for equal rights remains an important dimension of feminist politics, it is no longer necessary, as it was in the liberal humanist tradition, to link rights to sameness. Instead of sameness, it is possible to imagine a world in which difference is celebrated and enjoyed, free from the hierarchical structures of class, racial, sexual and gender power. Yet, to move towards such a world continues to require the articulation of marginalised voices and the self-affirmation of oppressed groups as well as the recognition by white, Western, heterosexual, middle class women of their structural privileges:

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of 'talking back', that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject-the liberated voice. (hooks 1989: 211)

All postcolonial feminists, wherever they are located, can contribute to making the existing social relations that produce hierarchical difference visible. This work is a fundamental prerequisite for social change and requires the positive recognition of difference in the struggle to redefine its meaning and reshape its material effects. In the words of Audre Lorde:

The future of our earth may depend on the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference. The old definitions have not served us, nor the earth that supports us. The old patterns, no matter how cleverly rearranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation and suspicion. (Lorde 1984: 123)

Works Cited

- Accad, Evelyne. (1996). "Truth versus Loyalty". In: Bell & Klein, 1996, 465-69.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria (ed.). (1990). *Making Face, Making Soul. Haciendo Caras. Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- _____. (1990a). "Haciendo caras, una entrada. An introduction by Gloria Anzaldúa". In: Anzaldúa, 1990, xv-xxviii.
- Bell, Diane & Renate Klein. (1996). *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed*. London: Zed Books.
- Bunch, Charlotte & Susana Fried. (1996). "Beijing 95: Moving Women's Human Rights from Margin to Centre". *Signs*, 22, 1, 1996, 200-204.
- Daly, Mary. (1979). *Gyn/Ecology*. London: The Women's Press.
- hooks, bell. (1989). *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist Thinking Black*. Boston. Mass.: South End Press.
- Huggins, Jackie. (1998). *Sister Girl*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press.
- Lorde, Audre. (1984). *Sister Outsider*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press.
- _____. (1984a). "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference." In: Lorde 1984, pp. 114-123.
- Mirza, Heidi Safia. (1997). *Black British Feminism. A Reader*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Mohanram, Radhika. (1999). *Black Body: Women, Colonialism and Space*. St Leonards NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. (1991). "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial

Discourse." In: Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, Ann Russo & Lourdes Torres (eds). *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991, 51-80.

Moraga, Cherrie & Gloria Anzaldúa (eds). (1981). *This Bridge Called My Back. Writings by Radical Women of Color*. New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.

Moraga, Cherrie. (1981a). "Refugees of a World on Fire. Foreword to the Second Edition". In: Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981.

_____. (1981b). "La Güera". In: Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981, 27-34.

Moreton-Robinson, Aileen. (2000). *Talkin' Up To the White Woman*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press.

Morrison, Toni. (1981). *The Bluest Eye*. London: Triad Grafton.

Narayan, Uma. (1997). *Dislocating Cultures. Identities, Traditions and Third World Feminism*. New York & London: Routledge.

Smith, Barbara. (1984). "Black Feminism: A Movement of Our Own." In: Karen Kahn (ed.). *Front Line Feminism, 1975-1995. Essays from Sojourner's First 20 Years*. San Fransisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1995, pp. 22-7.

Spivak, Gayatri. (1988). "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In: Cary Nelson & Lawrence Grossberg (eds.). *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. London: MacMillan 1988, 271-313.

Weedon, Chris. (1999). *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Sara Ahmed. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*
(London: Routledge, 2000)

By Paul Cooke, University of Wales, Aberystwyth

1 Routledge's *Transformations* series has produced a number of interesting volumes in recent years on post-colonial theory and feminism. Sara Ahmed's *Strange Encounters* is a welcome and stimulating contribution to this list. Whilst traditionally post-colonialism has concerned itself with the concept of 'The Other' in relationship to the ontological status of the subject, Ahmed focuses rather on the substantially more fluid concept of the 'stranger'. Through the prism of feminist and post-colonial discourses the book explores the tensions and contradictions implicit within the instrumentalisation of 'stangerness' in the production of embodiment and community.

2 The book opens with an examination of the phenomenon of what Ahmed terms 'stranger fetishism'. Initially through the metaphor of alien 'close encounters' (an image which does, perhaps, jar somewhat with the reader) she shows how communities construct 'the beyond' as a means of defining themselves. She argues that the alien

is not simply the one whom we have failed to identify ('unidentified flying objects'), but is the one whom we have already identified in the event of being named as alien: the alien recuperates all that is beyond the human into the singularity of a given form. The alien hence becomes a fetish. (p. 2)

The book then goes on to deconstruct the notion of 'Stranger fetishism' in an attempt to highlight how many aspects of society are contingent on a process through which the stranger becomes an abstracted, universalised figure: "Stranger fetishism is a fetishism of figures: *it invests the figure of a stranger with a life of its own insofar as it cuts 'the stranger' off from the histories of its determination.*" (p. 5 Ahmed's emphasis)

3 In order to highlight this process of fetishisation Ahmed explores a number of social discourses which are underpinned by the need for an encounter with strangers, be it in terms of their exclusion or inclusion. In Part One she begins with an examination of the concept of the "stranger danger" within the language of British 'Neighbourhood Watch' schemes. Communities, she argues, rely on the recognition of strangers as strangers, and in so doing underline the fragility and sense of crisis implicit within themselves. Utilising Althusser's thesis of interpellation, she examines how the act of naming the stranger in order to expel him/her from the neighbourhood also implicates him/her within its structure. Through this process of implication, she then suggests, one can see that it is the fear of the stranger within

which is actually the necessary impulse for the construction of the neighbourhood in the first place:

It is the very potential of the community to fail which is required for the constitution of the community. It is the enforcement of the boundaries between those who are already recognised as out of place (even other fellow residents) that allows those boundaries to be established. The 'ideal' community has to be worked towards and that labour requires failure as its moment of constitution.' (p. 26 Ahmed's emphasis)

This function of community construction is at the heart of the discourse of British Neighbourhood Watch schemes. Such schemes create an inextricable link between the recognition of the stranger and the construction of 'healthy' and 'pure' social spaces. What is particularly interesting about Ahmed's analysis is her examination of the deliberately empty nature of much of the language used in Home Office documents about the scheme. If we look at her close reading of the term 'suspicious', for example, she argues:

The good citizen is not given any information about how to tell what or who is suspicious in the first place. It is my argument that the very failure to provide us with techniques for telling the difference is itself a technique of knowledge. It is the technique of *common sense* that is produced through Neighbourhood Watch discourse. Common sense not only defines what 'we' should take for granted (that is, what is normalised and already known as 'the given'), but it also involves the normalisation of ways of 'sensing' the difference between common and uncommon. That is, information is not given about how to tell the difference between normal and suspicious, because that difference is already 'sensed' through a prior history of making sense *as* the making of 'the common'. [...] Neighbourhood watch is hence about *making* the common: it makes the community. (p. 29 Ahmed's emphasis)

4 The rest of Part One goes on to explore further the construction of the stranger as something which is recognisable, that is, something which, far from being simply outside, or other to the self, is contingent to the self. For example, through an exploration of the sensation of touch Ahmed suggests that the stranger is produced through a dialectic of *proximity* and distance. With regard to the question of 'embodiment', she suggests, "Strange bodies are precisely those bodies that are temporarily assimilated *as* the unknown within the encounter: they function as the border that defines both the space into which the familiar body [...] cannot cross, and the space in which such a body constitutes itself as at home" (p. 54).

5 This first section ends with an examination of how some post-colonial theorists have actually compounded the position of the stranger as fetishised figure. In particular she explores the discipline of ethnography, showing how ethnography's need to translate the experience of the stranger into a form understandable by the Western academy can lead to the appropriation of the stranger. Here she shifts the point of examination from the traditional problem of who has the right to speak for the post-colonial subject to "how does the act of

speaking already know 'the stranger' as within or without a given community?", that is, how does post-colonialism itself actually construct, and, ultimately, marginalise strangeness. This she does through her case study of the 'Bell debate', which centred around the white Australian feminist Diane Bell who controversially cited Topsy Napurrula Nelson, an indigenous Australian woman, as a co-author in an article about rape within the indigenous population.

6 Part Two, by far the strongest section of the book, takes up and develops further the notion of the appropriation and manipulation of the stranger within the context of global capitalism. Here she continues in her task of undermining all conceptions of an ontology of the stranger, preferring, rather, to look at the process through which ontology is produced. Particularly interesting is her analysis of the forces at work within migrant community formation, examining how strangeness itself can become a bond:

The forming of a community through the shared experience of not being fully at home - of having inhabited another space - presupposes an absence of a shared terrain: the forming of communities makes apparent the lack of a common identity that would allow its form to take one form. But this lack becomes reinscribed as the pre-condition of an act of making. [...] The process of estrangement is the condition for the emergence of a contested community, a community which 'makes a place' in the act of reaching out to the 'out-of-place-ness' of other migrant bodies. (p. 94 Ahmed's emphasis)

7 She then turns to the manipulation of the rhetoric of multiculturalism within Australia, exploring how the government appropriates difference in order to elide it, and in so doing reaffirm the power and values of the hegemony. In Australia, Ahmed argues, multiculturalism is reduced to the concept of accepting 'cultural diversity'. This, then allows the ruling elite to 'reinven[t] "the nation" over the bodies of strangers' (p. 95), since this form of multiculturalism actually

excludes any differences that challenge the supposedly universal values upon which that culture is predicated. Or, to put it more strongly, the official discourse of multiculturalism implies that differences *can* be reconciled through the very legislative framework which has historically defined Western values as neutral and universal. (p. 110 Ahmed's emphasis)

8 The final chapter of Part Two gives an good analysis of the consumption of stranger culture within Western multicultural society. Drawing on bell hook's vivid examination of the exoticisation of difference, 'Eating the Other', she explores how ethnicity is turned into something which is to be consumed by the Western subject:

Ethnicity becomes a spice or taste that can be consumed, that can be incorporated in the life world of the one who moves between (eating) places. Differences that can be consumed are the ones that are valued: difference is valued insofar as it can be

incorporated into, not only the nation space, but also the individual body [...]. By implication, *differences that cannot be assimilated into the nation or body through the process of consumption have no value* (p. 117-118 Ahmed's emphasis).

9 In Part Three of the book, Ahmed looks to move beyond the concept of stranger fetishism in order to gesture towards a new ethics of strangeness which attempts, among other things, to rehistoricise the process of stranger production. Taking as a starting point Levinas' call for the need to protect the 'otherness of the other' (p. 140), Ahmed places her examination of the process of encountering the stranger within a broader philosophical framework. Again, she insists that the key area of investigation is the mode of encounter, rather than the ontological status of the other encountered. In so doing she posits an ethic which engages dialectically with both the particular encounter with a particular stranger and the concept of universalism implicit within all such encounters.

10 Finally, Ahmed asks the question: how can her deconstruction of the concept of strangeness be applied to feminist discourses. Here she again calls for an awareness of the tendency for Western institutions (in this case the institution of 'International' feminism) to universalise their experience and speak for all people, and in this case specifically all women. Consequently, she suggests that feminism too falls into the trap of stranger fetishism. This she illustrates through an examination of attacks by Western feminists on 'the purdah' (the veil), which is conceived by many in the West as a sign of female oppression that can be given universal significance:

However, universalism could also be read as a fantasy of proximity. For, at one level, reading the 'veiled woman' as an oppressed woman who is sexually controlled involves a fantasy that one can inhabit the place of the other, that one already knows what 'the other' means (and therefore needs). Or, to put it differently, the emphasis on the universal wrong of the 'purdah' (and the assumption of women's right as the right 'not to wear the veil'), involves the fantasy that one can 'get inside the skin of the other' (and speak for her). (p. 166)

Concurring with Spivak, Ahmed sees this as a highly contentious position. However, unlike Spivak, Ahmed does not conclude that the project of feminism is to explore 'who is speaking', but rather to explore how we encounter who is speaking. She sums up:

What I am calling for, against either universalism or cultural relativism, is politics that is premised on closer encounters, on encounters with those who are other than 'the other' or 'the stranger' [...]. Such a politics based on encounters between other others is one bound up with responsibility - with recognising that (labouring) relations between others are always constitutive of the possibility of either speaking or not speaking. [...] It is the work that needs to be done to get closer to others in a way that does not appropriate their labour as 'my labour', or their talk as 'my talk, that makes possible a different form of collective politics. The 'we' of such a collective politics is what must be worked for, rather than being the foundation of our collective work (p. 180).

Difference should be seen as a productive dynamic, rather than that which must be overcome, or simply accepted.

11 The only real weakness to be found in the book is Ahmed's at times unnecessarily dense style, particularly in the theoretical sections (when focusing on her case studies Ahmed is far more lucid). Also, there is a propensity to give the reader some rather confusing and superfluous description (was it, for example, necessary to be told of the fact that the author danced in her home during the UN's conference on International feminism in 1995? (p. 164)). That said, *Strange Encounters* is a thoughtful and provocative intervention in the growing body of feminist post-colonial theory. What is particularly welcome is its call for cultural analysis to be rooted in the particular. In so doing, Ahmed provides a necessary corrective to much postmodern theory which would seem to elide the individual's relationship to material reality.

Stephanie Lawler. *Mothering the Self: Mothers, Daughters, Subjects*

(London and New York: Routledge, 2000)

By Alison Fell, The Queen's College, Oxford

1 The complex and multi-faceted relationships that exist between female identity, mothers, daughters and (the practice and institution of) motherhood have been the subject of intense debate since the emergence of the contemporary feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Marianne Hirsch in her study *The Mother/Daughter Plot* (1989), for example, situates the difficulty of defining motherhood 'at the breaking point between various feminist positions: between presence and absence, speech and silence, essentialism and constructivism, materialism and psychoanalysis.' She suggests, in other words, that debates surrounding motherhood and the mother-daughter relation have been central in/to feminist theories based upon a notion of equality, where women demand social and economic parity with men, and in/to those based upon a notion of difference, where women demand recognition for their 'feminine' specificity. While some feminist theorists take Simone de Beauvoir's groundbreaking study *The Second Sex* (1949) as a starting point, presenting motherhood as a patriarchal construction, as a trap that severely limits women's individual freedom, a number of 1970s and 1980s theorists considered motherhood and the mother-daughter relationship more positively, as alternative sources of female identity from those constructed by patriarchy.

2 Defining the meaning and value of motherhood and the mother-daughter relationship, then, has been central to post-war feminism. This is, of course, nothing new. The term 'mother' has always been capable of encompassing multiple contradictions, frequently functioning as a vehicle for the exploration of broader debates concerning, for example, education, the moral and physical welfare of the population, women's labour rights, ideas of nationhood, and the roles of nature and culture in the development of social and gender roles and identities. The definition of motherhood, in short, has frequently been related to the attainment of important political and economic objectives. The problem with many discussions of motherhood, and of the complex dynamics of mother-daughter relationships, is their failure to consider the actual experiences of flesh and blood individuals. Women's experience of maternity and the mother-daughter relationship may be mediated by cultural and political representations of motherhood, but there exists a gap between such representations and their daily practices. A key strength of Steph Lawler's study lies in the ways in which, rather than defending or (re)constructing certain debates around mothers and

daughters, she charts the interaction of individual women, both mothers and daughters, with various contemporary interpretations - cultural, political, feminist, medical, legal and so on - of motherhood in what she terms 'Euroamerican' societies. As she states in her Introduction, her work asks:

What does it mean, in late twentieth-century/early twenty-first century Euroamerican societies, to be a mother? To be a daughter? How are maternal and daughterly selves produced? In this context, these are not questions of metaphysics, but of the workings of knowledge in the social world and in the lives of individuals. (p. 3)

These are evidently large questions that cannot be covered in a single study. Nevertheless, *Mothering the Self* sheds light on a number of important issues involved in the "production" of "maternal and daughterly selves", and provides welcome relief from the ahistorical, universalising and non-materialist stances common amongst theorists keen to promote one particular version of the 'truth' of motherhood.

3 Starting from a Foucauldian understanding that "knowledges about the self, about mothers, about childhood, about the mother-daughter relationship are produced and reproduced in specific relations of social and political power, and in response to specific social and political preoccupations" (p. 3), Lawler examines data taken from interviews with fourteen British women, who are simultaneously mothers and daughters. She then places the emotions, experiences and conceptions of motherhood and the mother-daughter relation expressed by these women in the context of other, dominant 'knowledges' about childhood, mothering techniques and selfhood circulating in late twentieth/early twenty-first century Euroamerican societies. What she discovers is sometimes surprising and often moving.

4 The women's differing experiences are not, as is often assumed, necessarily rooted in the particular relationship they have with their child, but rather in class- and gender-based expectations of the roles they should perform. Their judgements of their own mothering practices and of their relationships to their mothers are frequently intermingled with feelings of guilt and shame, of anger and frustration as well as of satisfaction and pleasure. Chapter 5, for instance, discusses the common phenomenon of 'matrophobia', that is, the fear of becoming one's mother. Lawler argues that the desire to be different from one's mother is not only understandable in terms of psychoanalytic insights, or of the ways in which all mother-daughter relationships are characterised by conflicting feelings of identification and rejection. Rather, she argues that in the case of many of her interviewees matrophobia is irrevocably bound up in movement from one class to another. She argues that these particular women's fear of becoming their mothers "stems from insecurities around their class positioning" and that "these women's mothers may come to signify a class position to which they fear

returning" (p. 102). This leads us to read Hazel's (one of the interviewees) comments about her mother's "taste in furniture" (p. 107) and Barbara's dismissal of her mother as "a snob [...] a lot like Thora Hird" (p. 108) as expressions of their uncomfortable awareness that they have entered a different class to that of their mother, rather than simply as a dislike of their individual character traits.

5 In terms of dominant ideas about motherhood, Lawler consistently underlines the extent to which mothers are deemed to be responsible not only for creating balanced individuals, but also a harmonious society. She cites a number of authoritative male figures who celebrate women's 'natural' mothering and nurturing instincts, and reject non-normative - unloving, single, working, teenage - mothers as 'unnatural' and deviant. This includes politicians of both left and right. While, perhaps unsurprisingly, the British Conservative John Redwood confidently states, somewhat paradoxically, that "the natural state should be the two-adult family caring for their children" and his party colleague Kenneth Baker blames criminality on "erratic and inconsistent parenting", the Labour MP David Blunkett also blames parents (and here mothers are always first in the firing line) for poor results in children's education. Mothers have also been held responsible for the moral and psychological welfare of the population by a number of childcare 'experts', including the hugely influential psychologist Donald Winnicott who developed the notion of the "good-enough mother" in his radio broadcasts of the 1950s. Although this may seem a reasonable proposition, being "good-enough" is in reality highly demanding, and Winnicott sets exacting standards for mothers to follow. The "good-enough" mother is, in effect, "a woman whose whole life is bound up with the needs of her child" (p. 49). In contrast, women who are "masculine" or "preoccupied with themselves" (p. 49) are singled out for criticism. This mother-blaming tendency is particularly evident in Lawler's discussion of the Bulger case in the second chapter of her study. In 1993, Robert Thompson and Jon Venables, two 10-year-old boys, abducted the 2-year-old James Bulger from a shopping centre, and later murdered him. In her analysis of media reports of the case, Lawler shows how clichés about mothering practices come into play in debates surrounding the guilt or innocence of Thompson and Venables, whether they should be considered as "evil monsters" or as "damaged victims" (p. 41). Lawler convincingly argues that, because middle-class childhood is constructed as 'normal' and 'natural', the working-class childhoods of Thompson and Venables are held to be at least partly responsible for their crimes.

6 Lawler shows throughout her study how working-class childhoods and parenting techniques are constantly taken as 'deviant' in relation to the middle-class norms: "Middle-

classiness becomes the norm against which others are measured: it is also the norm to which working-class people are supposed to aspire" (p. 79). It is against such norms that Hazel and Barbara, cited above, judge their mothers and find them wanting. Lawler questions the validity of these "commonplace and common-sense" (p. 168) middle-class understandings of motherhood and childhood, pointing to the damaging effect on women of childcare 'experts' who construct 'normal' mothers as "having no desires beyond the (biologically or socially impelled) desire to have children" (p. 150). In her analysis of the interviews, Lawler looks at various ways in which women succeed in resisting such child-centred understandings about mothering. As one interviewee, Lynn, comments, mothering can engender a loss of identity on the part of the mother: "The time that [child-care] responsibilities take up is time that's taken away from me to be myself" (p. 164). Nearly all of the women interviewed appear to have developed a number of strategies in which they allow themselves to slip out of the role of mother in order to "be themselves", and to resist the dominant ideal of the devoted and selfless mother. As Lawler concludes, mothers and daughters do not simply passively absorb information and knowledges relating to mothering, childhood and mother-child relationships. Rather, they tend to "find ways of resisting the occlusion of the maternal self" which Lawler reads as "an indication of their unwillingness to wholly participate in 'expert' understandings of motherhood" (p. 166). The story ends, then, on a more positive note. Mothers have been held responsible throughout history for the conduct and physical and emotional development of their offspring. And feminists have been just as guilty as others in assuming that 'the shaping of the self is [...] within the mother's gift' (p. 51). But, although for both mothers and daughters the experience of motherhood can be a painful and complex aspect of their lives, the interviewees in this study also demonstrate a degree of agency in relation to the demands made of them - more agency, perhaps, than Foucault himself would have recognised as possible.

7 As the series editors suggest, Steph Lawler's book is timely and important. It focuses not only on daughters' experience of their relationships with their mothers - long the subject of feminist enquiry - but also on that of mothers' own experiences. This rectifies a major lacuna in the majority of theorisations of motherhood. The most convincing and interesting aspects of the study relate to the analysis of real data - whether cases in the media or the collected interviews - in relation to deeply entrenched assumptions about the role and function of mothers. The more theoretical sections, particularly in the first chapter, seem in contrast rather superfluous at times - while detailed discussion of methodology, for example, may be necessary for an academic dissertation, it could have been omitted for publication. Foucault is

also clearly a guiding light from the very beginning, but is not acknowledged as such until midway through the first chapter. The author's non-critical stance in relation to Foucault also jars a little in the closing stages of the book, where she suggests a more flexible notion of resistance to dominant power structures than that which exists in the majority of Foucault's writings. These, however, are minor quibbles. Lawler's study is an original and stimulating contribution to the field of gender study and deserves a wide readership.

Murray Pomerance. *Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls. Gender in film at the end of the twentieth century* (SUNY Press: New York, 2001).

By Dirk Schulz, University of Cologne, Germany

1 With the ever increasing interest in cultural (re)presentations of gender, the body and sexuality, *Ladies & Gentlemen* should find a warm reception and wide readership. The most remarkable aspect of this collection of essays is the enormous variety of geographical, theoretical and personal prisms through which films, film genres, filmmakers and actors/actresses are discussed, as well as the different formal and social concerns of analysis which the chapters cover. Though there is no way of doing each of the chapters justice, the following outline will hopefully delineate the complexity of concerns addressed.

2 In his introduction, editor Murray Pomerance points to the complex nature of cultural (re)presentations of, and our relation to, our performed and embodied gender:

As a symbolizing attribute, reformulated through staging, gender constitutes one of our many ways of dividing the world and then classifying and ordering the divisions [...]. As a mask, or public face- how many genders are there, and what suffices as a presentation of any one of them? [...] If a film can show us a gendered individual whom we can recognize, and if it can show how social forces conspire to shape and constrain classes according to classifications of gender, it can also narrate a circumstance we apprehend and experience as gendered viewers. (p.4, 5, 10)

Grounded in different personal viewing experiences, it is not surprising, then, that each of the 18 chapters of this book recognise and concern themselves with different aspects of cinematic representations of gender. The intermingling of personal and theoretical approaches towards viewing not only seems inevitable, but necessary for a better understanding of the "shaped and the expressed [...] the 'performative' and embodied" (p.3) characteristics of gendered "identity".

3 *Ladies & Gentlemen* is subdivided into three parts, of which the first investigates *Screened Gender beyond the Hollywood Hills*. It starts off with "No Safe Place: Gender and Space in Polanski's Recent Films", an essay on films directed by the Polish director "whose films have always been charged with violence emanating from and oriented around sex and sexuality" (p.19). But instead of perpetuating "the public perception of him as a manipulative misogynist" (p.19), Steve Woodward argues that, due to the immense popular media interest in Roman Polanski's personal life, its "scandals" and "misereries", too little attention has been paid to the actual politics and themes of his films. Woodward convincingly examines the recurring aesthetic and artistic patterns with which Polanski tells stories of abuse, revenge,

isolation, "the politics of power enacted in all sexual relationships" (p.35).

4 In the next chapter, "Veiled Voice and Vision in Iranian Cinema: The Evolution of Rakhshan Banietemad's Films", Hamid Naficy illuminates the conflicting paradigms of the "populist cinema [which] affirms the postrevolutionary Islamic values more fully at the level of plot, theme, characterization, mise-en-scène, and portrayal of women" and the "quality cinema [which] engages with those values and tends to critique current social conditions" (p.38) that progressively shape Iranian cinema. By charting the development discernible in the career of Rakhshan Banietemad, which he sees as exemplary, he argues that "despite the continued oppression of women and Draconian censorship, the constraints on women's representation lessened, and filmmakers with each film pushed the boundaries of what was allowed" (p.51) in one of the most productive film industries in the world.

5 "Boy-Girls: Gender, Body, and Popular Culture in Hong Kong Action Movies", Lenuta Giukin's contribution, "concentrates on the use and implications of gender defining techniques in Hong Kong martial arts movies, where gender boundaries and narrative conventions are more flexible than in Hollywood action movies" (p.56). By looking at several examples of Hong Kong action movies, she links the unconventional hybridity of their heroines to the hybridity of Hong Kong culture as a whole:

[while] in Chinese cinema the authoritarian centralized regime forbids the presence in art of any ambiguous sexuality, Hong Kong had the freedom under the English rule to come in contact through mass media with popular debate(s) on gender issues (p. 68).

The diverse and sometimes contradictory gender portrayals in Hong Kong cinema therefore play with and mirror the subject's confused feeling of sexual identity "where convention and transgression are written on the body" (p. 69).

6 In "The Gender of GeneraAsian X in Clara Law's Migration Trilogy", Gina Marchetti also refers to the concept of "hybridity of transnational culture [which] has enabled the dismantling of stable categories and has created the potential for the reformulation of increasingly fluid notions of race and gender" (p. 71). However, with regard to the female protagonists of Law's Migration Trilogy, Marchetti argues that her films become morality tales, because they "cling to conservative closures for their narrative conundrums. Women's sexuality in particular poses the most salient threat and is the element most harshly reined in as each film works through to its conclusion" (p. 85). The fragmentation of the subject, the breakdown of fixed notions of racial, national and sexual identities in this case does not stimulate a way of creative reformulation, but rather seems to be answered with the cinematic portrayals of "the reconfigured presence of the liberated woman as the wanton vixen in need

of a clear lesson" (p. 5).

7 Part II of *Ladies & Gentlemen*, entitled *Genders and Doings* begins with a chapter on "Eating and Drinking, Men and Women". Rebecca Bell-Metereau scans the ways in which "the two most fundamental and life-affirming pleasures - eating and sex" (p. 91) are highlighted and linked in various films, and what this reveals about the power relations of traditional gender roles. "Aside from the sex act, few human activities carry as much gendered psychological baggage as that of eating" (p. 92). Metereau holds that notions of body functions, of consumption and union, of "the oral and sexual roots of the psyche" (p. 93), associated both with eating and sex, are loaded with feelings of pleasure and guilt. Eating, as something too easily taken for granted, has most often been naturalized as self-evident. But:

Fear of death and the yearning for an undifferentiated connection with another human being find expression in images of eating and sex. [...] Films about food are about anything but food. They allow audiences to displace anxieties about sex and death onto images of consumption (p.106-107).

8 In the following chapter "Boys Will Be Boys: David Cronenberg's Crash Course in Heavy Mettle", Murray Forman questions the critically challenging impact ascribed to Cronenberg's acclaimed film *Crash*. While seen by many critics as an attack on America's obsession with car culture and the associated discourses of masculinity, virility, and power, Forman, by focussing on its conceptualization and portrayal of masculinity, persuasively explains by example that, "rather than dislodging dominant forms and concepts of sex, sexuality and gender, Cronenberg has instead kept them in circulation, revitalizing standard practices (p. 125)."

9 The next essay, "The Wabbit We-negotiates: Looney Tunes in a Conglomerate Age", directs attention to gender portrayals in cartoons which, according to Kevin S. Sandler often feature

momentary and vicarious transgression(s) of gender boundaries. However, by film's end, any suggestion of sexual or gender indeterminacy is eventually negated, stopped and corrected through the reconstitution of gender difference and heterosexual preference. [...] The masquerade in these cartoons does not challenge gender constructions. It continually reifies gender and sexual difference by ridiculing femininity and labelling the feminized male as absurd. (p.131)

Sandler's investigation, especially of the marketing strategies of Disney and Warner Bros., compellingly reveals the dominant ideology at work behind gender inscriptions in cartoon characters.

10 As the title of the subsequent chapter, "Real Men Don't Sing and Dance: Growing Up

Male with the Hollywood Musical - A Memoir", suggests, its main emphasis is on Garth Jowett's personal experience of how the musical genre initiated and shaped his identification with white, heterosexual masculinity as performed on the screen. Though his declaration of love for Hollywood musicals and their specific importance of presenting a 'different' kind of 'maleness' is certainly widening the gender debate, his occasional ridicule and resentment of recent feminist and queer film and body/gender theory will presumably jar with many readers.

11 Gaylin Studlar's essay, "Cruise-ing into the Millennium: Performative Masculinity, Stardom, and the All-American Boy's Body", explores the phenomenon of Tom Cruise's enduring high profile as both an actor, tabloid regular and American icon. She persuasively explores Cruise's ambiguous cinematic and media performance of (sexual) agency and objectification, which grants him sex symbol status while keeping both straight and queer readings possible. Given the latest tabloid news, one can be sure that Tom Cruise would not enjoy reading this chapter.

12 In "Strange Days: Gender and Ideology in New Genre Films", Barry Keith Grant looks at the challenging and reformulating aesthetics of the so-called new genre films. He argues that Hollywood movies "have come to an ideological crossroads, increasingly pressured to address, if not redress, the regressive implications of conventional representations of gender and race" (p. 185). The growing awareness of gender and racial issues and the commercial success of *Thelma & Louise* (1991) initiated a wide reaching revision in what Grant terms postclassical Hollywood, of genre films such as western, science fiction, thriller and road movies, which before tended to portray masculinity and femininity in fixed and traditional, hetero-normative terms.

13 The seven essays in the third part of the book, *Paragons and Pariahs*, again illustrate the apparently contradictory or indecisive state of gender representations in recent (American) cinema, where the depictions of socially marginalized individuals obtain increasing interest as both instances of subversion and correction, embracing difference as attractive. But, by presenting them as different, they often leave traditional and popular assumptions on gender and sexuality unchallenged.

14 Frances Gateward's discussion of images of women riding motorcycles in "She-Devils on Wheels" extends and accentuates Barry Keith Grant's chapter on New Genre Films. Gateward postulates that "(i)n the case of female biker films, the appropriation of formula allows women to challenge gender roles by reclaiming the popular genre of action adventure" (p. 215). As movies which disrupt the ongoing association of cars and motorcycles with masculinity and virility, a point that is already suggested in Murray Forman's study of David

Cronenberg's film *Crash*, they deserve more public attention. But, by referring mainly to independent films, this chapter also accurately contrasts their marginalized status with mainstream Hollywood's presentation of female biker chic as fetishized and objectified.

15 John Sakeri's look at Hollywood's latest portrayals of homosexuality also contrasts art house or fringe productions with mainstream offerings such as *In & Out*. As the subtitle of this chapter, "Howard's First Kiss: Sissies and Gender Police in the New Old Hollywood" suggests, big American productions still maintain the notion of homosexuality as a confusion of gender and sex. Because queerness would otherwise pose a serious threat to any conception of sex and gender as a binary system, it has to be constantly presented as outside the norm, different, manifesting another dichotomy of hetero- versus homosexuality, with heteronormativity remaining uncontested at the end of each film. So, although films such as *In & Out* do try to create sympathy for their homosexual characters, a triumph of some sorts, they do not seriously defy the power balance and the heterosexual matrix.

16 In the following chapter "Hipsters and Nerds: Black Jazz Artists and Their White Shadows", Krin Gabbard explores the equally socially marginalized figure of the white, male (jazz) record collector. What at first seems like a personal self-explanation and defence (Gabbard ends his essay with the words: "If I am wrong about all this, I still have my record collection" p. 246) gains more and more argumentative value, as he dismantles how "American masculinity is built upon the great contradiction that it is performative at the same time that, at least for familiar middle-class white versions, it must not present itself as performance" (p. 235). The high profiled displays of action film heroes such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sean Connery and Harrison Ford, account for the simplification of popular images of 'typical' masculine identity as white, spectacular, testosteronistic (should we add aged?) which suppresses 'different' identificatory possibilities.

17 The film *Thelma & Louise* gets mentioned throughout this collection of essays as a ground breaking reconfiguration of gender portrayal in mainstream cinema, and "Let's keep Going: On the Road with Thelma and Louise" dedicates one specific chapter to this movie which, according to Janice R. Welsch, mirrors the women's movement by

redefining and sampling an array of ways to be in the world, pressing men to adjust and rethink their positions as well. *Thelma & Louise* suggests how difficult this process is, given the patriarchal restraints still in place. (p. 263)

Welsch brilliantly examines her own as well as the public's vivid and often ambiguous reception of the film's revisionary daring characterisation techniques, its plot, ending and the ongoing heated debate about the feminist and/or moral value of the film.

18 The figure of the male Jew is the focus of David Desser's study, entitled: "Jews in Space: 'The Ordeal of Masculinity' in Contemporary Film and Television". Again, the mutual process of 'different' male self- and re-presentation and conceptualisation is scrutinised. Looking at influential writers, directors, actors and various portrayals of Jewish males in the culture industry, Desser argues that "associations with bookishness, education, the arts, entertainment, and the like have been historically more associated with racialism, and anti semitism than with desirability and sex appeal" (p. 278). Desser traces the subsequent ambiguity of both embracing and struggling with this image in cultural representations.

19 In the next chapter "Gender and Other Transcendences: William Blake as Johnny Depp", Michael DeAngelis examines and links 'difference' from yet another angle, namely the seemingly opposing racial and gender attributes comprised and epitomised in the poet's body of work and the actor's persona. What becomes obvious is the attractiveness of the outsider figure as an embodiment of liberation from society's constraints of identification and classification.

20 The last chapter of this book, "Marion Cranes Dies Twice", reveals the evolution of "screened gender" in Hollywood by looking at the original (1960) and the remake (1998) of one of the most popular films ever, namely *Psycho*. Murray Pomerance compellingly argues that "(d)ying a second time, Marion Crane is not a protagonist packaged in guilt or gender, but only and pathetically a passer-by in the wrong place at the wrong time. [...] (G)ender and brutality are mundane facts of late twentieth-century life, not moral mysteries" (p. 314). With so many articles on Gus Van Sant's remake as being a superfluous undertaking for either equalling or disgracing Hitchcock's classic, Pomerance's forceful analysis illustrates how, when viewed through a "gender prism", their 'difference' becomes undeniably evident and significant.

21 While the book's subdivision into three parts at times appears arbitrary and forced, this collection of essays accounts for the complexity of possible gender readings and their importance in structuring our world. The eighteen chapters also point to our diverse and sometimes contradictory expectations, hopes and fears of how and why 'we' believe our 'identity' is represented. With the stunning variety of concerns addressed, this book is highly recommended to everyone interested in questions of gender.

**Gender, Race, and Internal Colonization: An Asian Americanist Review of
Traise Yamamoto's *Masking Selves, Making Subjects: Japanese American
Women, Identity, and the Body*.**

By Sarita See, Williams College (Massachusetts)

1 In Asian American studies, it generally is presumed that what binds an otherwise extremely heterogeneous minority population is its historical, legal exclusion from the American body politic. In the nation's imaginary and laws, Asian Americans' claim to citizenship is a fragile thing-something abjured, withheld, and forged most dramatically during national crises. Traise Yamamoto's *Masking Selves, Making Subjects: Japanese American Women, Identity, and the Body* underscores the continued necessity for Asian Americans to claim America, a nation that incarcerated Americans of Japanese descent during World War II. That juridical vulnerability has particularly harmful repercussions for Asian American women, whose subjectivities and struggles against patriarchy, nativism, and racism are structurally circumscribed by what the Black feminist theorist Deborah King calls "multiple jeopardy." Yamamoto's study is an exceptionally eloquent example of an Asian Americanist contribution to the critical race feminism movement in the U.S.

2 Yet for me and for many other Filipino Americans, the question of citizenship is haunted by a legacy of American colonialism. The history of Filipinos in America runs counter to the above-described premise of exclusion in Asian American studies. In contrast to that of exclusion, Filipino American history has been one of violent inclusion in the United States empire, beginning in 1899 with the devastating Philippine-American War and the subsequent colonization of the Philippines. At least partially because of Asian American studies' emphasis on East Asian Americans, postcolonial and empire studies has been perceived as something "new" or peripheral within the field. Yet as this tension within Asian American studies occasionally threatens to fracture a relatively small community of scholars, the emergence of studies like Yamamoto's reminds us that gender-specific and ethnic-specific scholarship potentially bridges and contributes to both sides of this divide. Yamamoto states that the contours of a "critical humanism" emerge from the book's specificity. Instead, I would argue that *Masking Selves, Making Subjects* is an invaluable but sometimes flawed study of the gendered and raced effects of what Michael Omi and Howard Winant call "internal" colonization.

3 Yamamoto identifies in nuanced ways a Japanese American women's writing tradition, both a product and creative reappropriation of a specific history of internal colonization. This

is no easy task, for describing such a tradition has its particular pitfalls. Of some of these Yamamoto is keenly cognizant, such as an over-reliance on generational difference or the reinforcement of cultural and racial stereotype (i.e. the impassive, unfeeling Oriental or the generally feminized Orient, and the embodiment of these stereotypes in Japanese American women). Opening her introduction with a familial anecdote, Yamamoto forebodes the interpretative and historical irony that runs throughout the study. Yamamoto describes the "exceptionally closed" face of her grandmother in a 1938 family photograph. She muses the im/possibilities of reading a face that "understands its own readability." This face recognizes that it has no control over how it will be read, and it habitually constructs a protective mask. It is an historical product of the sheer need to survive the twinned forces of racism and sexism. Ironically, however, this impassivity is all too easily appropriated by Orientalism and converted into stereotype. Thus, Yamamoto revisits a crucial question with which scholars of African American and Asian American literature still grapple: How are we responsibly to read such wary texts? The book's title puns on "masking" as an act or process emanating from dominant fiction as well as from the self; the title "suggests a process enacted by an agency separate from the socially defined self as well as a self whose agency is enacted in the process of masking." Thus, Yamamoto selects a trope-the mask-that relies on a basic division between surface and depth, a binary that becomes problematic since it invokes essentialist notions of "humanist interiority." Yamamoto wants to retain both a sense of constructedness and a kind of interiority-a "place for the self."

4 From the introduction on, the face and mask become the primary metaphors for and within Japanese American women's writing, especially autobiography. If all good (and bad) metaphors contain arguments, the argument here is that texts like Monica Sone's *Nisei Daughter* (1953), Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar* (1973), and Yoshiko Uchida's *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family* (1982) all employ a kind of "tonal masking" for their "own ends." Yamamoto's often-dazzling close readings provide both the teacher and critic with superb models for analyzing Asian American literature, African American literature, and other literatures wherein an engagement with the terrain of double consciousness is essential.

5 But other pitfalls, Yamamoto does not so gracefully negotiate. For example, in early chapters Yamamoto spends some time on United States-Japan relations as historical backdrop to her analyses of a wide array of cultural and literary texts: late nineteenth-century and late twentieth-century Western travel writing about Japan, classic Hollywood movies like *Teahouse of the August Moon* and *Sayonara*, and James Michener bestsellers. Yet while

Japan's relationship to the United States is likened to that of colonized and colonizer, Japan's imperial ambitions and history in Asia receive nary a comment. This is an unfortunate omission that could have been corrected by the explication of a short but intriguing footnote on the "Occupation narrative." A book that inspires and reminds the teacher of literature of the immense value of close reading, *Masking Selves, Making Subjects* at times falters when it tries its hand at broader cultural claims. In one particularly jarring example, Yamamoto tries to intervene in the fairly longstanding controversy over cosmetic surgery, particularly eyelid surgery, in some Asian American communities. Yamamoto takes issue with critics who denounce those who undergo the surgery as motivated by racial self-hatred and "trying to look white." Yamamoto then mulls the possibility that this "practice" may in fact constitute "an act of contestation and complicity, an act of reappropriation as well as an act of reinscription that foregrounds the impossibility of any 'pure' space of resistance or affirmation." I think it more productive to consider the route offered by legal theorist Patricia Williams who suggests that the eugenicist application of new technologies indicate a new human desire not to change but to flee one's body.¹

6 While *Masking Selves, Making Subjects*'s forays into broader historical and cultural argument occasionally falter, the best chapters are those wherein close literary readings compose the bulk of the chapter and anchor the larger, theoretical argument about the staging of the narratorial self in Nisei and Sansei writing. If this is a book that divides its chapters by historical period and generation, the chapters themselves return repeatedly to the significance of generational tension within Japanese American women's literature. The final chapter on Japanese American women's poetics, in the work of Kimiko Hahn, Janice Mirikitani, and Mitsuye Yamada, powerfully describes the structural failure of both memory and narrative to recall the presence of the mother. Yamamoto argues that the representation of the lost mother-and, implicitly, that of the daughter-poet's grief-can never be complete. Yet this lost presence can be summoned by these texts: "Paradoxically, it is in their ability to evoke but not represent the mother that the limits of language gesture toward the fullness of being." On that elusive yet powerful final note, *Masking Selves, Making Subjects* sounds the call for a new generation of critical race feminists.

¹ Williams writes: "Sometimes I feel as though we are living in a time of invisible body snatchers-as though some evil force had entered the hearts and minds of an entire epoch and convinced them that they should shed their skin, cut off their noses, fly out of their bodies, leave behind their genetic structure as they climb up the DNA ladder to an imagined freedom," *The Rooster's Egg: On the Persistence of Prejudice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 241-2.

List of Contributors

Natascha Würzbach, the founder of gender Inn, dedicated her career as a Professor of English at Cologne University to establishing Gender Studies as a field of academic research in Germany. She currently directs a research project on Gender and Modernism, funded by the German Research Foundation.

Victoria Smith, guest professor of English at Cologne University, is an acclaimed critic and teacher of feminist theory and women's writing on both sides of the Atlantic. Based on her experience of Gender Studies at American and German universities, she provides a personally committed analysis of the state of the art within feminist theory and its institutionalisation in the United States. She is currently working on a book on feminist theories of loss and representation.

Chris Weedon, Professor of German and Cultural Studies at the Centre of Critical and Cultural Theory at the University of Cardiff, is an expert on gender, race and cultural theory. In her publications she addresses issues of feminism in the context of poststructuralism, postmodernism and recent discussions of class and race. In her contribution she examines the implications of postcolonial feminism from a Western perspective.

Paul Cooke

Alison Fell

Dirk Schulz

Sarita See