that it is possible to speak from a location above or beyond this powerful structuring opposition. My own position, throughout this text, is that of an anti-essentialist who wants to preserve (in both senses of the term: to maintain and to embalm) the category of essence. The complications and limitations as well as the possibilities and stratagems of this contradictory position will I hope become clear as the successive readings of essentialism unfold. Perhaps it only needs final emphasizing at this point that the project of interrogating essence wherever we may find it does not necessarily entail simultaneously dismissing it. By the same logic, to reach a clearer understanding of constructionism we must begin by recognizing and coming to terms with its internal contradictions. Simultaneously applying concentrated pressure to *both* sides of the binarism will yield a rather different set of conclusions about essentialism and constructionism than the prevalent appraisals of these heavily invested terms in critical discourse today, and it may offer a possible means, not to bypass, but to work through the many difficult, seemingly irresolvable debates this particular polemic inevitably seems to engender.

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1

The "Risk" of Essence

One of the prime motivations behind the production of this book is the desire to break or in some way to weaken the hold which the essentialist/constructionist binarism has on feminist theory. It is my conviction that the deadlock created by the long-standing controversy over the issue of human essences (essential femininity, essential blackness, essential gayness . . .) has, on the one hand, encouraged more careful attention to cultural and historical specificities where perhaps we have hitherto been too quick to universalize but, on the other hand, foreclosed more ambitious investigations of specificity and difference by fostering a certain paranoia around the perceived threat of essentialism. It could be said that the tension produced by the essentialist/constructionist debate is responsible for some of feminist theory's greatest insights, that is, the very tension is constitutive of the field of feminist theory. But it can also be maintained that this same dispute has created the current impasse in feminism, an impasse predicated on the difficulty of theorizing the social in relation to the natural, or the theoretical in relation to the political. The very confusion over whether or not the essentialist/constructionist tension is beneficial or detrimental to the health of feminism is itself overdetermined and constrained by the terms of the opposition in question.

One needs, therefore, to tread cautiously when mapping the boundaries of this important structuring debate for feminism. This chapter will begin by identifying the two key positions which are largely responsible for the current deadlock, and it will discuss some of the strengths and weaknesses of each position. One of the main contentions of this book is that essentialism, when held most under suspicion by constructionists, is often effectively doing its work elsewhere, under other guises, and sometimes laying the groundwork for its own critique. The bulk of the chapter will therefore address the way in which essentialism is *essential* to social constructionism, a point that powerfully

throws into question the stability and impermeability of the essentialist/constructionist binarism. To this end I will look closely at currently two of the most important and influential theories of anti-essentialism, Lacanian psychoanalysis and Derridean deconstruction. In both cases I intend to demonstrate the way in which the logic of essentialism can be shown to be irreducible even in those discourses most explicitly concerned with repudiating it.

Essentialism vs. Constructionism

Essentialism is classically defined as a belief in true essence—that which is most irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing. This definition represents the traditional Aristotelian understanding of essence, the definition with the greatest amount of currency in the history of Western metaphysics.[1] In feminist theory, essentialism articulates itself in a variety of ways and subtends a number of related assumptions. Most obviously, essentialism can be located in appeals to a pure or original femininity, a female essence, outside the boundaries of the social and thereby untainted (though perhaps repressed) by a patriarchal order. It can also be read in the accounts of universal female oppression, the assumption of a totalizing symbolic system which subjugates all women everywhere, throughout history and across cultures. Further, essentialism underwrites claims for the autonomy of a female voice and the potentiality of a feminine language (notions which find their most sophisticated expression in the much discussed concept of *écriture féminine*).[2] Essentialism emerges perhaps most strongly within the very discourse of feminism, a discourse which presumes upon the unity of its object of inquiry (women) *even* when it is at pains to demonstrate the differences within this admittedly generalizing and imprecise category.

Constructionism, articulated in opposition to essentialism and concerned with its philosophical refutation, insists that essence is itself a historical construction. Constructionists take the refusal of essence as the inaugural moment of their own projects and proceed to demonstrate the way previously assumed self-evident kinds (like "man" or "woman") are in fact the effects of complicated discursive practices. Anti-essentialists are engaged in interrogating the intricate and interlacing processes which work together to produce all seemingly "natural" or "given" objects. What is at stake for a constructionist are systems of representations, social and material practices, laws of discourses, and ideological effects. In short, constructionists are concerned above all with the *production* and *organization* of differences, and they therefore reject the idea that any essential or natural givens precede the processes of social determination.[3]

Essentialists and constructionists are most polarized around the issue of the relation between the social and the natural. For the essentialist, the natural provides the raw material and determinative starting point for the practices and laws of the social. For example, sexual difference (the division into "male" and "female") is taken as prior to social differences which are presumed to be mapped on to, *a posteriori*, the biological subject. For the constructionist, the natural is itself posited as a construction of the social. In this view, sexual difference is discursively produced, elaborated as an effect of the social rather than its *tabula rasa*, its prior object. Thus while the essentialist holds that the natural is *repressed* by the social, the constructionist maintains that the natural is *produced* by the social.[4] The difference in philosophical positions can be summed up by Ernest Jones's question: "Is woman born or made?" For an essentialist like Jones, woman is born not made; for an anti-essentialist like Simone de Beauvoir, woman is made not born.

Each of these positions, essentialism and constructionism, has demonstrated in the range of its deployment certain analytical strengths and weaknesses. The problems with essentialism are perhaps better known. Essentialist arguments frequently make recourse to an ontology which stands outside the sphere of cultural influence and historical change. "Man" and "woman," to take one example, are assumed to be ontologically stable objects, coherent signs which derive their coherency from their unchangeability and predictability (there have *always* been men and women it is argued). No allowance is made for the historical production of these categories which would necessitate a recognition that what the classical Greeks understood by "man" and "woman" is radically different from what the Renaissance French understood them to signify or even what the contemporary postindustrial, postmodernist, poststructuralist theoretician is likely to understand by these terms. "Man" and "woman" are not stable or universal categories, nor do they have the explanatory power they are routinely invested with. Essentialist arguments are not necessarily ahistorical, but they frequently theorize history as an unbroken continuum that transports, across cultures and through time, categories such as "man" and "woman" without in any way (re)defining or indeed (re)constituting them. History itself is theorized as essential, and thus unchanging; its essence is to generate change but not itself to *be* changed.

Constructionists, too, though they might make recourse to historicity as a way to challenge essentialism, nonetheless often work with uncomplicated or essentializing notions of history. While a constructionist

might recognize that "man" and "woman" are produced across a spectrum of discourses, the categories "man" and "woman" still remain constant. Some minimal point of commonality and continuity necessitates at least the linguistic retention of these particular terms. The same problem emerges with the sign "history" itself, for while a constructionist might insist that we can only speak of *histories* (just as we can only speak of feminisms or deconstructionisms) the question that remains unanswered is what motivates or dictates the continued semantic use of the term "histories"? This is just one of many instances which suggest that essentialism is more entrenched in constructionism than we previously thought. In my mind, it is difficult to see how constructionism can *be* constructionism without a fundamental dependency upon essentialism.

It is common practice in social constructionist argumentation to shift from the singular to the plural in order to privilege heterogeneity and to highlight important cultural and social differences. Thus, woman becomes women, history becomes histories, feminism becomes feminisms, and so on. While this maneuver does mark a break with unitary conceptual categories (eternal woman, totalizing history, monolithic feminism), the hasty attempts to pluralize do not operate as sufficient defenses or safeguards against essentialism. The plural category "women," for instance, though conceptually signaling heterogeneity nonetheless semantically marks a collectivity; constructed or not, "women" still occupies the space of a linguistic unity. It is for this reason that a statement like "American women are 'x' " is no less essentializing than its formulation in the singular, "*The* American woman is 'x.' " The essentialism at stake is not countered so much as *displaced*.

If essentialism is more entrenched in constructionist logic than we previously acknowledged, if indeed there is no sure way to bracket off and to contain essentialist maneuvers in anti-essentialist arguments, then we must also simultaneously acknowledge that there is no essence to essentialism, that essence *as* irreducible has been *constructed* to be irreducible. Furthermore, if we can never securely displace essentialism, then it becomes useful for analytical purposes to distinguish between *kinds* of essentialisms, as John Locke has done with his theory of "real" versus "nominal" essence. Real essence connotes the Aristotelian understanding of essence as that which is most irreducible and unchanging about a thing; nominal essence signifies for Locke a view of essence as merely a linguistic convenience, a classificatory fiction we need to categorize and to label. Real essences are discovered by close empirical observation; nominal essences are not "discovered" so much as assigned or produced—produced specifically by language.[5] This specific distinction between real and nominal essence corresponds roughly to the broader oppositional categories of essentialism and constructionism: an essentialist assumes that innate or given essences sort objects naturally into species or kinds, whereas a constructionist assumes that it is language, the names arbitrarily affixed to objects, which establishes their existence in the mind. To clarify, a rose by any other name would still be a rose—for an essentialist; for a constructionist, a rose by any other name would not be a rose, it would be something altogether rather different.

Certainly, Locke's distinction between real and nominal essence is a useful one for making a political wedge into the essentialist/constructionist debate. When feminists today argue for maintaining the notion of a *class* of women, usually for political purposes, they do so I would suggest on the basis of Locke's nominal essence. It is Locke's distinction between nominal and real essence which allows us to work with the category of "women" as a *linguistic* rather than a natural kind, and for this reason Locke's category of nominal essence is especially useful for anti-essentialist feminists who want to hold onto the notion of women as a group without submitting to the idea that it is "nature" which categorizes them as such. And yet, however useful the "real" versus "nominal" classification may be for clarifying the relation between essence and language (transposing essence as an effect of language), the distinction it proposes is far from an absolute one. Real essence is itself a nominal essence—that is, a linguistic kind, a product of naming. And nominal essence is still an essence, suggesting that despite the circulation of different kinds of essences, they still all share a common classification *as essence*. I introduce the Lockean theory of essence to suggest both that it is crucial to discriminate between the ontological and linguistic orders of essentialism and that it is equally important to investigate their complicities as types of essentialisms, members of the same semantic family.

My point here, and throughout this book, is that social constructionists do not definitively escape the pull of essentialism, that indeed essentialism subtends the very idea of constructionism. Let me take another example, one often cited as the exemplary problem which separates the essentialist from the constructionist: the question of "the body." For the essentialist, the body occupies a pure, pre-social, prediscursive space. The body is "real," accessible, and transparent; it is always *there* and directly interpretable through the senses. For the constructionist, the body is never simply there, rather it is composed of a network of effects continually subject to sociopolitical determination.

The body is "always already" culturally mapped; it never exists in a pure or uncoded state. Now the strength of the constructionist position is its rigorous insistence on the production of social categories like "the body" and its attention to systems of representation. But this strength is not built on the grounds of essentialism's demise, rather it works its power by strategically deferring the encounter with essence, displacing it, in this case, onto the concept of sociality.

To say that the body is always already deeply embedded in the social is not by any sure means to preclude essentialism. Essentialism is embedded in the idea of the social and lodged in the problem of social determination (and even, as I will later argue, directly implicated in the deconstructionist turn of phrase "always already"). Too often, constructionists presume that the category of the social automatically escapes essentialism, in contradistinction to the way the category of the natural is presupposed to be inevitably entrapped within it. But there is no compelling reason to assume that the natural is, in essence, essentialist and that the social is, in essence, constructionist. If we are to intervene effectively in the impasse created by the essentialist/constructionist divide, it might be necessary to begin questioning the *constructionist* assumption that nature and fixity go together (naturally) just as sociality and change go together (naturally). In other words, it may be time to ask whether essences can change and whether constructions can be normative.

Lacanian Psychoanalysis

It has often been remarked that biological determinism and social determinism are simply two sides of the same coin: both posit an utterly passive subject subordinated to the shaping influence of either nature or culture, and both disregard the unsettling effects of the psyche.[6] There is a sense in which social constructionism can be unveiled as merely a form of sociological essentialism, a position predicated on the assumption that the subject is, in essence, a social construction. It may well be that at this particular historical moment it has become imperative to retrieve the subject from a total subordination to social determination. Perhaps that is why so many feminist theorists have turned to psychoanalysis as a more compelling, less essentializing account of the constructionist process. Psychoanalysis is in many ways the anti-essentialist discourse *par excellence* in that sexual difference is taken as something to be *explained* rather than assumed. But even psychoanalysis cannot do its work without making recourse to certain essentialist assumptions.

This is an important point since, next to deconstruction, psychoanalysis is generally the discourse most strongly identified as sufficiently able to repudiate metaphysical idealism and its reliance upon essentialism. Lacan refuses all treatments of the subject which take as self-evident an essential, pre-given identity; he is more concerned with displacing the classical humanist subject by demonstrating the production of the subject in language. I will have much more to say about Lacan's semiotic decentering of the subject in subsequent chapters, but for now I am interested in whether an account of the subject based on language can fully detach itself from the essentialist notions it claims so persistently to disinherit. I locate three main areas where Lacan leans heavily on essentialist underpinnings in order to advance an anti-essentialist argument: his emphasis on the speaking subject; his much heralded return to Freud; and, finally, his controversial theory of woman. Each of these points will be addressed in turn, but first it is imperative not to miss the point that constructionism is heavily indebted to Lacan for some of its greatest insights. Even a necessarily abbreviated account of Lacan's sophisticated and complex theory of the psyche will underscore the immense importance of his work for social constructionists.

Lacan's contribution to constructionism emerges out of his revision of some key Freudian concepts. For Freud, the Oedipus complex is the fundamental structure responsible for the formation of sexual identity in the child. But Lacan insists that while oedipal relations and the complicated processes of identification and desire they engender are crucial to the child's psychical development, the Oedipus complex is not a given but rather itself a problem to be elucidated through psychoanalytic inquiry. According to Lacan, Freud "falsifies the conception of the Oedipus complex from the start, by making it define as natural, rather than normative, the predominance of the paternal figure" ("Intervention on Transference," Mitchell and Rose 1982, 69). For Lacan the Oedipus complex is not biologically framed but symbolically cast; in fact, it is a product of that order which Lacan labels "the Symbolic." More specifically, the Symbolic represents the order of language which permits the child entry into subjectivity, into the realm of speech, law, and sociality. The Imaginary signifies the mother-child dyad which the Symbolic interrupts through the agency of the paternal function—the "Name-of-the-Father," rather than the biological father *per se*. Through this important shift from the father to the Name-of-the-Father, Lacan denaturalizes the Oedipal structure which Freud takes as universal, de-essentializes Freud's theory of subject constitution by opening it up to the play of language, symbol, and metaphor.

A second important point of revision which further positions Lacan as more "truly" anti-essentialist than Freud pertains to the role of the phallus in sexual differentiation. Here, too, Lacan faults his predecessor for failing to make the crucial distinction between anatomical organ (the penis) and representational symbol (the phallus). Freud repeatedly collapses the two, leaving himself vulnerable to charges of biologism and essentialism. Lacan is more careful to separate them, insisting that the phallus is not a fantasy, not an object, and most especially not an organ (the penis or the clitoris) ("The Meaning of the Phallus," Mitchell and Rose 1982, 79). The phallus is instead a *signifier*, a privileged signifier of the Symbolic order which may point to the penis as the most visible mark of sexual difference but nevertheless cannot be reduced to it. This non-coincidence of phallus and penis is important because "the relation of the subject to the phallus is set up regardless of the anatomical difference between the sexes" ("The Meaning of the Phallus," 76). In a sense, the phallus is *prior* to the penis; it is the privileged mark through which both sexes accede to sexual identity by a recognition and acceptance of castration.

There are a number of problems with Lacan's penis/phallus distinction which will be discussed here and at greater length in Chapter Four. To the extent that the phallus risks continually conjuring up images of the penis, that is, to the extent that the bar between these two terms cannot be rigidly sustained, Lacan is never very far from the essentialism he so vigorously disclaims. It is true that the phallus is *not* the penis in any simple way; as a signifier it operates as a sign in a signifying chain, a symbolic metaphor and not a natural fact of difference. But it is also true that this metaphor derives its power from the very object it symbolizes; the phallus is pre-eminently a metaphor but it is also metonymically close to the penis and derives much of its signifying importance from this by no means arbitrary relation. It is precisely because a woman does not have a penis that her relation to the phallus, the signifying order, the order of language and the law, is so complicated and fraught with difficulties. The privileging of the phallus as "transcendental signifier" (the signifier without a signified) has led to charges that Lacan is endorsing the phallocentrism he purports to critique. Luce Irigaray and Jacques Derrida have both detected in Lacan a perpetuation and strengthening of phallocentrism rather than its undoing.[7] This charge in turn has led to counter-charges that Lacan's detractors have confused the messenger with the message; at least two important defenders of Lacan, Juliet Flower MacCannell and Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, insist that Lacan is merely *describing* the effects of a phallocentric logic and not *prescribing* or in any way deploying them

himself.[8] But in my mind these defenses are ultimately unconvincing, since "description" is never a pure form and can never escape a certain complicity with its object. Derrida, one of the first to take Lacan to task for the "phallogocentric transcendentalism" of his thinking, observes that "description is a 'participant' when it induces a practice, an ethics, and an institution, and therefore a politics that insure the truth of the tradition" (1980, 481). Such is the case with Lacan I would argue. But I must also add that despite Derrida's disclaimers that he has produced anything resembling a practice, an ethics, an institution, or a politics, Derridean deconstruction is no less "free" than Lacanian psychoanalysis from a pervasive albeit hidden (all the more pervasive because it is hidden) reliance upon essentialism. Both discourses profess to inhabit a theoretical space free of the taint of essentialism, but as I now hope to show, the very staking out of a *pure* anti-essentialist position simply reinscribes an inescapable essentialist logic.

While Lacan strategically employs linguistics to clean Freud's house of biologism, essentialism quietly returns to poststructuralist psychoanalysis through the back door, carried on the soles of Lacan's theory of signification. Lacan is careful to specify that when he says the subject is constituted in language, language does *not* signify for him mere social discourse. Lacan is here following Ferdinand de Saussure's description of language as a system of relational signs, where meaning is a product of differences between signs and not an essential property of any fixed sign. Saussure makes a well-known distinction between "speech" and "language" in which speech (the individual communication act) is "accidental" and language (the communal system of rules and codes which govern speech) is "essential" (1915, 14). Lacan, recognizing the inseparability of one from the other, sees both language and speech as "essential" to the founding of the human subject. For Lacan is first and foremost concerned with "the speaking subject" and with "the subjection of the subject to the signifier" ("The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious" 1977, 304). In Lacanian psychoanalysis, speech is firmly inscribed as a discourse of truth; simply put, "speech connotes truth" ("The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" 1977, 43).[9] The case can be stated even more strongly. What is irreducible to the discourse of psychoanalysis ("the talking cure") is speech. And, within the terms of this discourse, what is universal to psychoanalysis is the production of the subject *in the Symbolic*. From its institutional beginnings, psychoanalysis has relied upon "the function and field of speech and language" as its essential de-essentializing mechanisms of

subject constitution, and (in Lacan's own words) it has taken as "self-evident fact that it deals solely with words" ("Intervention on Transference," Mitchell and Rose 1982, 63).

This brings us to the essentialism within Lacan's overall aim to return the institution of psychoanalysis to its authentic Freudian roots. Lacan's mission is to restore psychoanalysis to its essential truths, to what is most radical and irreducible about it. I must disagree with those commentators on Lacan who interpret his notion of a "return to Freud" as "merely a slogan."[10] Lacan's goal is to reinstate the truth of psychoanalysis, to recapture "the Freudian experience along authentic lines" ("Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud" 1977, 171). The "return to Freud" may be in part a slogan (a rallying cry to turn psychoanalysis away from the distorted humanist appropriations of Freud by object-relations theorists and other post-Freudians) but it is also a symptom of Lacan's own complicity with an unacknowledged humanism (a sign of a certain susceptibility to the lure of meaning and Truth). In "The Freudian Thing, or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis," Lacan employs the logic of the chiasmus to argue that "the meaning of a return to Freud is a return to the meaning of Freud" (1977, 117). The "return to Freud" cannot be easily divorced from the notions of authenticity, recuperation, and truth-discourse which it repeatedly invokes. Perhaps it is this indissociability of the idea of return from the ideology of humanism which compels Lacan to acknowledge, at the end of the English selection of *Ecrits*, that it is humanism which marks the return of the repressed in his own work: "I must admit that I am partial to a certain form of humanism, a humanism that . . . has a certain quality of candour about it: 'When the miner comes home, his wife rubs him down . . .' I am left defenceless against such things" ("The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious" 1977, 324).

The choice of a working-class couple (a wife attending to the material bodily needs of her miner-husband) to signal his "defencelessness" in the face of lived experience is an unusual example for Lacan, who generally makes few references in his work to class positions or material relations. This tendency points to an important vestige of essentialism in Lacan's theory of subjectivity: the assumption that the subject is raceless and classless. The Lacanian subject is a sexed subject first and last; few allowances are made for the way in which other modes of difference might complicate or even facilitate the account of identity formation Lacan outlines along the axis of sex alone. Within the specific realm of sexual differentiation, essentialism emerges most strongly in Lacan's very attempts to displace the essence of "woman." Of real

material women, such as the miner's wife, Lacan has nothing to say, readily admits his knowing ignorance. But of "woman" as sign Lacan has everything to say (especially since women, as we shall see, cannot say "it" themselves).

In Seminar XX, devoted to the enigma of woman and the riddle of femininity, Lacan tells us that woman, as such, does not exist:

> when any speaking being whatever lines up under the banner of women it is by being constituted as not all that they are placed within the phallic function. It is this that defines the . . . the what?—the woman precisely, except that *The* woman can only be written with *The* crossed through. There is no such thing as *The* woman, where the definite article stands for the universal. ("God and the *Jouissance* of ~~The~~ Woman," Mitchell and Rose 1982, 144)

On the surface, Lacan's erasure of the "The" in "The woman" is a calculated effort to de-essentialize woman. Eternal Woman, the myth of Woman, Transcendental Woman—all are false universals for Lacan, held in place only by the dubious efforts of the "signifier which cannot signify anything"—the definite article "the" ("God and the *Jouissance* of ~~The~~ Woman," 144). But is Lacan's mathematical "woman" (in "Seminar of 21 January 1975" he describes woman as an "empty set") any less universalizing than the metaphysical notion of woman he seeks to challenge? Essence quickly reappears as a "risk" Lacan cannot resist taking: "There is no such thing as *The* woman since of her essence—having already risked the term, why think twice about it?—of her essence, she is not all" ("God and the *Jouissance* of ~~The~~ Woman," 144). The project to de-essentialize "woman" is activated on the grounds of simultaneously re-essentializing her. The "risk" lies in the double gesture, the very process of transgressing the essentialist/constructionist divide.

In defining the essence of woman as "not all," the penis/phallus distinction once again comes into play, but this time as a way to keep essentialism in place. "It is through the phallic function that man takes up his inscription as all," Lacan explains in "A Love Letter" (Mitchell and Rose 1982, 150). All speaking beings are allowed to place themselves on the side of the not all, on the side of woman. Woman's supplementary *jouissance*, a *jouissance* "beyond the phallus," is "proper" to biological women but not exclusive to them. Men (specifically male mystics for Lacan) can also occupy the subject-position "woman"; in fact, "there are men who are just as good as women. It does happen" ("God and the *Jouissance* of ~~The~~ Woman," 147). But,

importantly, the converse is not true for Lacan: not all speaking beings are allowed to inscribe themselves on the side of the all, since only men have penises which give them more direct access to "the phallic function." Exclusion from *total* access to the Symbolic's privileged transcendental signifier has certain implications for the already castrated woman, not the least of which is a highly problematized relation to speech and language. "There is woman only as excluded by the nature of things which is the nature of words" we are told ("God and the *Jouissance* of ~~The~~ Woman," 144). Speaking specifically of woman's *jouissance* beyond the phallus, Lacan can only conclude that it is "impossible to tell whether the woman can say anything about it—whether she can say what she knows of it" ("A Love Letter," 159).

Derrida's attempts to speak (as) woman have provoked considerable controversy, but little has been said of Lacan's perhaps more veiled attempts to do the same. Desire *for* the Other often manifests itself as desire to speak as Other, from the place of the Other (some would even say, *instead* of the Other). I read Lacan's difficult and equivocal style not just as a strategic evocation of the laws of the Unconscious (which is how it is usually understood) but also, since woman is presumed to be closer to the Unconscious, as an attempt to approximate the speech-less, the not all, the elusive figure of Woman who personifies Truth. Through the device of the quotation marks, Lacan literally assumes the voice of Woman/Truth in "The Freudian Thing" (1977, esp. 121–23). But in a more general way, through the evasive and elliptical style which is his trademark, Lacan attempts to bring woman to the point of speech by approximating the vanishing point in his own speech. In his theory of woman as "not all," Lacan posits the essence of woman as an enigmatic excess or remainder. In this regard, woman remains for Lacan the enigma she was for Freud. In fact, essence operates in Lacan as a leftover classical component which re-emerges in his theory of woman precisely because it is woman who escapes complete subjection to the Symbolic and its formative operations. In her inscription as not all (as Truth, lack, Other, *objet a*, God) woman becomes for Lacan the very repository of essence.

Derridean Deconstruction

And what of Derrida's theory of essence? Does Derrida "transcend" essentialism more successfully than Lacan, and if not, where is it inscribed and what implications might it hold for the most rigorous anti-essentialist discourse of all: deconstruction? My position here is that the possibility of any radical constructionism can only

be built on the foundations of a hidden essentialism. Derrida would, of course, be quick to agree that despite the dislocating effects of deconstruction's strategies of reversal/displacement we can never get beyond metaphysics, and therefore, since all of Western metaphysics is predicated upon Aristotle's essence/accident distinction, we can never truly get beyond essentialism. This is why we should not be surprised to see certain metaphysical holds operative in Derrida's own work, supporting even his relentless pursuit of binary oppositions and phenomenological essences. My interest in exploring what Derrida calls "fringes of irreducibility" (1972c, 67) as they operate in deconstruction itself is motivated not by a desire to demonstrate that Derrida is a *failed* constructionist (this would be a pointless exercise, given the terms of my argument) but by an interest in uncovering the ways in which deconstruction deploys essentialism against itself, leans heavily on essence in its determination to displace essence. Derrida's theory of woman is one place to start, though as I hope to show, essentialism works its logic through a number of important "Derrideanisms," including the emphasis upon undecidability and the related notions of contradiction and heterogeneity.

Woman and undecidability are, in fact, rather closely linked in Derrida's work. This intimate association is most evident in *Spurs* (1978) where Derrida attempts to come to grips with the question "What is woman?" through a sustained reading of the inscription of woman in Nietzsche's philosophy. Woman occupies for Nietzsche the site of a contradiction: she represents both truth and non-truth, distance and proximity, wisdom and deceit, authenticity and simulation. But Derrida points out that woman can be none of these things, in essence, since "there is no such thing as a woman, as a truth in itself of woman in itself" (101). Like Lacan, Derrida's project is to displace the essence of woman, but also like Lacan, Derrida is actively engaged in the redeployment of essentialism elsewhere. For Derrida, woman operates as the very figure of undecidability. It is woman as undecidable variable who displaces the rigid dualisms of Western metaphysics: "The question of the woman suspends the decidable opposition of true and non-true and inaugurates the epochal regime of quotation marks which is to be enforced for every concept belonging to the system of philosophical decidability" (107). Woman, in short, is yet another figure for *différance*, the mechanism which undoes and disables "ontological decidability" (111). But more than this, she is the non-place which centers deconstruction's own marginal status in philosophical discourse. When Gayatri Spivak identifies the phenomenon of woman's "double displacement" in deconstruction, she is referring to the tendency of decon-

struction to announce its own displacement by situating woman as a figure of displacement (see Spivak 1983 and Spivak 1984). While there may be nothing essentialistic about this maneuver *per se*, one at least has to recognize that positing woman as a figure of displacement risks, in its effects, continually displacing real material women.

"Choreographies" (1982) extends Derrida's critique of the essence of woman by warning against the dangers of seeking to locate and to identify "woman's place": "in my view there is no one place for woman. It is without a doubt risky to say that there is no place for woman, but this idea is not anti-feminist . . ." (68). There is an interesting slippage here from the claim that "there is no one place for woman" to the claim that "there is no place for woman"—two rather different statements indeed. But Derrida's point seems to be simply that a "woman's place," a single place, must necessarily be essentializing. This is doubtless true, but we need to ask whether positing multiple places for women is necessarily any *less* essentializing. Does "woman's *places*" effectively challenge the unitary, metaphysical notion of the subject/woman who presumably fills these particular places and not others? Derrida also makes the claim in "Choreographies" that there is no essence of woman, at least no "essence which is rigorously or properly identifiable" (72). Here one sees more clearly the opening for essentialism's re-entry onto the stage of deconstruction, for in the end Derrida does not so much challenge that woman has an essence as insist that we can never "rigorously" or "properly" identify it. Woman's essence is simply "undecidable," a position which frequently inverts itself in deconstruction to the suggestion that it is the essence of woman to *be* the undecidable. To say that woman's essence is to be the undecidable is different from claiming that woman's essence is undecidable and different still from claiming that it is undecidable whether woman has an essence at all. Derrida's theory of essence moves between and among these contradictory positions, playing upon the undecidability and ambiguity which underwrites his own deconstructionist maneuvers.

Let me shift focus then to deconstruction itself and to its decisive encounter with Husserlian phenomenology. It is by no means insignificant that Derrida's earliest published pieces manifest a preoccupation with essentialism and especially with the place of essence in phenomenology. Phenomenology is defined in Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1901) as the study of the essence of human consciousness. Essence is not a question of empirical investigation but rather a matter of pure abstractions—the very foundation of logic and mathematics. A case is made by Husserl for "an *a priori* necessity of essence" (443); objects are seen to have "pure essences" which are self-evidently true—"non-

empirical, universal, and unconditionally valid" (446). Husserl believed that by removing essence from the empirical realm of natural science and relocating it in the universal realm of pure logic he was achieving a radical break with metaphysics. Essence, in this early twentieth-century phenomenological view, is not something that lies behind a given thing, but rather essence is that which is most *self-evident* and *self-given* about that thing: a figure is, in essence, a triangle if the sum of its angles add up to 180 degrees. In Husserlian phenomenology, then, it is self-evidence which operates as the basis of epistemology, the validation of the truth of all knowledge.

Derrida explicitly takes on the project to displace phenomenological essence in several of his early works, including *Speech and Phenomena* (1967b),[11] and his aim is what we have now come to see as characteristically Derridean: "to see the phenomenological critique of metaphysics betray itself as a moment within the history of metaphysical assurance" (1967b, 5). Because transcendental phenomenology is rooted in the idea of *givenness*, Derrida's tactic is to apply enough analytical pressure to the concept of self-evidence to pry open phenomenology's deeply rooted investments with metaphysics. To the extent that Husserl's work aspires to be a science of essence, phenomenology emerges not as metaphysics' most radical subversion but as its most successful reinscription. Phenomenology, Derrida shows, seeks not only to preserve the central place of essence in metaphysics, it also seeks to return metaphysics to its own essence—its essence as "first philosophy." Derrida's critique of Husserl's epistemology of essences is a particularly persuasive one, for he convincingly demonstrates that essences, as Husserl understands them, are pre-cultural and atemporal and therefore inescapably ontological.[12]

In yet another twist of the metaphysical screw, deconstruction itself can only sustain its project to undo the normative operations of phenomenal essences by activating the "philosopheme" of essence under other, less obvious guises. Essence manifests itself in deconstruction in that most pervasive, most recognizable of Derridean phrases, "always already" (*toujours déjà*).[13] This phrase marks a phenomenological carryover in Derrida's work, a point of refuge for essentialism which otherwise, in deconstruction, comes so consistently under attack. It is my belief that "always already" frequently appears at those points where Derrida wishes to put the brakes on the analysis in progress and to make a turn in another direction. Occurrences of "always already" (or sometimes its abbreviated form "always") function as stop signs that alert us to some of Derrida's central assumptions—for example, his assumption in "Racism's Last Word" that the name "apartheid" is not

merely the "last word" but also the first word of racism: "hasn't *apartheid* always been the archival record of the unnameable?" (1985a, 291) Importantly, the controversy and debate which has surrounded Derrida's piece on apartheid rests heavily on this seemingly innocent and innocuous little word, "always." Consider Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon's much debated materialist response to Derrida's "Racism's Last Word":

> When Derrida asks, "Hasn't *apartheid* always been the archival record of the unnameable?" (p. 291), the answer is a straightforward no. Despite its notoriety and currency overseas, the term *apartheid* has not always been the "watchword" of the Nationalist regime (p. 291). It has its own history, and that history is closely entwined with a developing ideology of race. ("No Names Apart: The Separation of Word and History in Derrida's 'Le Dernier Mot du Racisme' " 1986, 141)

What Nixon and McClintock are objecting to is the idealism in Derrida's work, the "severance of word from history" (141). Not only do I believe that there is some basis for such a claim, I would also maintain that it is the use of the term "always" which operates as the hidden trip wire which captures the word *apartheid* in the prison house of language. Yet Derrida himself objects strongly to the charge that he has failed to historicize properly the word *apartheid*, and he objects on the grounds that Nixon and McClintock have merely substituted *their* version of "always" for *his* version of "always"—in other words, that it is they, and not he, who have taken the contested word out of its proper context:

> Once again you mistake the most evident meaning of my question. It did not concern the use of the word *by* the Nationalist regime but its *use value* in the world, "its notoriety and currency overseas," as you so rightly put it. The word "always" in my text referred to this notoriety and there is little matter here for disagreement. But I never said that *apartheid* has "always" been the *literal* "watchword" *within* the Nationalist regime. And I find the way you manage to slip the "always" out of *my* sentence ("but hasn't *apartheid* always been the archival record of the unnameable?") and into *yours* ("the term *apartheid* has not always been the 'watchword' of the Nationalist regime") to be less than honest. To be honest, you would have had to quote the whole sentence in which I myself speak of the "watchword" as such. ("But, beyond . . . [Open Letter to Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon]" 1986, 160)

No one can turn a criticism back upon his opponents more dexterously and more dramatically than Derrida, and yet I am compelled to wonder why Derrida thinks his use of the term "always" is *more* "self-evident" than Nixon and McClintock's; there is a not so subtle presumption here that Nixon and McClintock have bastardized the term "always" by reading it historically, temporally, "literally"—sullied its purer metaphorical, indeed *metaphysical*, connotations with less sophisticated materialist trappings.

A danger implicit in the ready application of the logic of *toujours déjà* is the temptation to rely upon the "always already" self-evident "nature" of "always already." The fact that "always already" is a phrase that has been so readily appropriated (and on occasion parodied) in academic circles immediately casts suspicion on its efficacy. At the present moment, "always already" has such wide currency amongst poststructuralists and non-poststructuralists alike that it has lost much of the rhetorical power and energy which characterizes its appearances in Derrida's work. Consider Houston Baker's otherwise suggestive discussion of the blues as "the multiplex enabling *script* in which Afro-American cultural discourse is inscribed" (1984, 4). In *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (1984), Baker identifies the blues as the central trope in Afro-American culture, but exactly why the blues have come to function as the *primary* "script" of Afro-American literature is by no means clear. Just when we expect an explanation from Baker on his choice of the blues, he tells us that "they are what Jacques Derrida might describe as the 'always already' of Afro-American culture" (4). But why the blues? Why not, as at least one other critic of Afro-American culture has wondered, "spirituals, jubilees, hollers, work songs . . . or jazz" (Tracy 1985, 100)? Or why not, for that matter, an expressive cultural form *other* than music? Baker's invocation of "always already" is a surprising moment in a context which clearly demands historicization; while the specificity of the blues genre is rigorously historicized in Baker's text, the *choice* of the blues (as the very quintessence of Afro-American expressive culture) curiously is not. The danger (and the usefulness) of "always already" is that it *implies* essence, it hints at an irreducible core that requires no further investigation. In so doing, it frequently puts a stop to analysis, often at an argument's most critical point.

In Derrida's work "always already" operates as something of a contradiction: it arrests analysis at a crucial stage, but it also shifts analytical gears and moves us along in another direction, much like the "switch engines" of one of Baker's railway roundhouses. It is a technique which deliberately frustrates closure and keeps meaning in

play; but it is also a technique that relies upon the self-evidence of contradiction and heterogeneity. In his response to Nixon and McClintock, we see that what gets fetishized in Derrida's work is precisely this notion of contradiction:

> Far from relying on "monoliths" or "bulky homogeneities," I constantly emphasize heterogeneity, contradictions, tensions, and uneven development. "Contradiction" is the most frequently occurring word in my text. (165)

By my count (since we seem to be engaged in a numbers game here), the most frequently occurring word (noun?) in Derrida's "Racism's Last Word" is not "contradiction" but "apartheid." Could we not say that, within the terms of Derrida's investigation, "apartheid" has been symptomatically erased by "contradiction," and is this not Nixon and McClintock's point in the end? "Contradiction" emerges as the "always already" of deconstruction, its irreducible inner core without which it could not do its work. It is *essential* to deconstruction, and as such it runs the risk of reification and solidification, a point that Derrida seems elsewhere to be fully aware of ("Différance," for example) and yet here he does not hesitate to summon contradiction's unassailable power to silence his critics. After citing the many instances in which he spoke of contradiction in "Racism's Last Word," Derrida writes, angrily: "Is that a sign of monolithic thinking and a preference for homogeneity? This will surely have been the first time I have met with such a reproach, and I fear you deserve it more than I do" (165). Derrida holds a mirror up to his detractors and reflects their charges of "monolithic thinking" and "homogeneity" back to them, unwilling to recognize any possible contradictions within his own discourse, willing only (in surprisingly unDerridean fashion) to treat contradiction on a thematic level and not on a deeper textual level.

"The risk of essence may have to be taken"

Despite the uncertainty and confusion surrounding the sign "essence," more than one influential theorist has advocated that perhaps we cannot do without recourse to irreducibilities. One thinks of Stephen Heath's by now famous suggestion, "the risk of essence may have to be taken" ("Difference" 1978, 99). It is poststructuralist feminists who seem most intrigued by this call to risk essence. Alice Jardine, for example, finds Stephen Heath's proclamation (later echoed by Gayatri Spivak) to be "one of the most thought-provoking statements of recent

date" ("Men in Feminism: Odor di Uomo Or Compagnons de Route?" in Jardine and Smith 1987, 58). But not all poststructuralist feminists are as comfortable with the prospect of re-opening theory's Pandora's box of essentialism. Peggy Kamuf warns that calls to risk essentialism may in the end be no more than veiled defenses against the unsettling operations of deconstruction:

> How is one supposed to understand essence as a *risk* to be run when it is by definition the non-accidental and therefore hardly the apt term to represent danger or risk? Only over against and in impatient reaction to the deconstruction of the subject can "essence" be made to sound excitingly dangerous and the phrase "the risk of essence" can seem to offer such an appealing invitation. . . . "Go for it," the phrase incites. "If you fall into 'essence,' you can always say it was an accident." ("Femmeninism," in Jardine and Smith 1987, 96)

In Kamuf's mind, risking essence is really no risk at all; it is merely a clever way of preserving the metaphysical safety net should we lose our balance walking the perilous tightrope of deconstruction.

But the call to risk essence is not merely an "impatient reaction" to deconstruction (though it might indeed be this in certain specific instances); it can also operate as a deconstructionist strategy. "Is not strategy itself the real risk?" Derrida asks in his seminar on feminism ("Women in the Beehive," in Jardine and Smith 1987, 192). To the deconstructionist, strategy of any kind is a risk because its effects, its outcome, are always unpredictable and undecidable. Depending on the historical moment and the cultural context, a strategy can be "radically revolutionary or deconstructive" or it can be "dangerously reactive" (193). What is risky is giving up the security—and the fantasy—of occupying a single subject-position and instead occupying two places at once. In a word, "we have to negotiate" (202). For an example of this particular notion of "risk" we can turn to Derrida's own attempts to dare to speak as woman. For a male subject to speak as woman can be radically de-essentializing; the transgression suggests that "woman" is a social space which any sexed subject can fill. But because Derrida never specifies *which* woman he speaks as (a French bourgeois woman, an Anglo-American lesbian, and so on), the strategy to speak as woman is simultaneously re-essentializing. The risk lies in the difficult negotiation between these apparently contradictory effects.

It must be pointed out here that the constructionist strategy of specifying more precisely these sub-categories of "woman" does not necessarily preclude essentialism. "French bourgeois woman" or "Anglo-American

lesbian," while crucially emphasizing in their very specificity that "woman" is by no means a monolithic category, nonetheless reinscribe an essentialist logic at the very level of historicism. Historicism is not always an effective counter to essentialism if it succeeds only in fragmenting the subject into multiple identities, each with its own self-contained, self-referential essence. The constructionist impulse to specify, rather than definitively counteracting essentialism, often simply redeploys it through the very strategy of historicization, rerouting and dispersing it through a number of micropolitical units or sub-categorical classifications, each presupposing its own unique interior composition or metaphysical core.

There is an important distinction to be made, I would submit, between "deploying" or "activating" essentialism and "falling into" or "lapsing into" essentialism. "Falling into" or "lapsing into" implies that essentialism is inherently reactionary—inevitably and inescapably a problem or a mistake.[14] "Deploying" or "activating," on the other hand, implies that essentialism may have some strategic or interventionary value. What I am suggesting is that the political investments of the sign "essence" are predicated on the subject's complex positioning in a particular social field, and that the appraisal of this investment depends not on any interior values intrinsic to the sign itself but rather on the shifting and determinative discursive relations which produced it. As subsequent chapters will more forcefully suggest, the radicality or conservatism of essentialism depends, to a significant degree, on *who* is utilizing it, *how* it is deployed, and *where* its effects are concentrated.

It is important not to forget that essence is a sign, and as such historically contingent and constantly subject to change and to redefinition. Historically, we have never been very confident of the definition of essence, nor have we been very certain that the definition of essence is to *be* the definitional. Even the essence/accident distinction, the inaugural moment of Western metaphysics, is by no means a stable or secure binarism. The entire history of metaphysics can be read as an interminable pursuit of the essence of essence, motivated by the anxiety that essence may well be accidental, changing and unknowable. Essentialism is not, and has rarely been, monolithically coded. Certainly it is difficult to identify a single philosopher whose work does not attempt to account for the question of essentialism in some way; the repeated attempts by these philosophers to fix or to define essence suggest that essence is a slippery and elusive category, and that the sign itself does not remain stationary or uniform.

The deconstruction of essentialism, rather than putting essence to rest, simply raises the discussion to a more sophisticated level, leaps

the analysis up to another higher register, above all, keeps the sign of essence in play, even if (indeed *because*) it is continually held under erasure. Constructionists, then, need to be wary of too quickly crying "essentialism." Perhaps the most dangerous problem for anti-essentialists is to see the category of essence as "always already" knowable, as immediately apparent and naturally transparent. Similarly, we need to beware of the tendency to "naturalize" the category of the natural, to see this category, too, as obvious and immediately perceptible *as such*. Essentialism may be at once more intractable and more irrecuperable than we thought; it may be essential to our thinking while at the same time there is nothing "quintessential" about it. To insist that essentialism is always and everywhere reactionary is, for the constructionist, to buy into essentialism in the very act of making the charge; *it is to act as if essentialism has an essence.*

Notes

Introduction

1 Stephen Heath (1978), Alice Jardine (1987), Naomi Schor (1987), and Gayatri Spivak (1987) have all endorsed a renewed consideration of essentialism.

2 Teresa de Lauretis, for example, has at different times articulated both these positions. See "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts," in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (1986, 2) and *The Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (1987, 10).

1 The "Risk" of Essence

1 A comprehensive discussion of the essence/accident distinction is elaborated in Book Z of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. For a history of the philosophical concept of essentialism, readers might wish to consult DeGrood (1976) or Rorty (1979).

2 See, for example, Hélène Cixous's contribution to *The Newly Born Woman* (1986).

3 I want to emphasize here that most feminist theorists are, in fact, *both* essentialists and constructionists. E. Ann Kaplan, who often takes the essentialist/anti-essentialist distinction as a primary organizational frame in her discussions of film and television criticism, has identified four "types" of feminism: bourgeois feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, and poststructuralist feminism (1987, 216). The first three types—bourgeois, Marxist, and radical—Kaplan categorizes under the rubric "essentialist"; the fourth type—poststructuralist—she labels "anti-essentialist." I would submit that the division here is much too simplistic to be useful: it sees *all* poststructuralist feminists as anti-essentialists and *all other* feminists as essentialists. Such a schema cannot adequately account, for example, for the work of Luce Irigaray, a poststructuralist Derridean who many consider to be an essentialist; nor can it account for a theorist like Monique Wittig who appears to fall into at least two of Kaplan's essentialist categories, Marxist feminism and radical feminism, and yet who identifies herself as a committed social constructionist. We must be extremely wary of using the constructionist/essentialist opposition as a taxonomic device for elaborating oversimplified and deceptive typologies (another powerful argument to be made in favor of working to subvert, rather than to reify, this particularly pervasive dualism).

4 I am reminded of that curious but common saying, "second nature." The qualifier "second" implies orders, gradations, types of "nature." It further implies that some "kinds" of nature may be closer to the ideal or prototype than others—indeed, that some may be more "natural" than others. Essentialism here crumbles under the weight of its own self-contradiction and opens the door to viewing essence as a social construct, a production of language.

5 For example, the nominal essence of gold (Locke's favorite example) would be "that complex idea the word gold stands for, let it be, for instance a body yellow, of a certain weight, malleable, fusible, and fixed"; its real essence would be "the constitution of the insensible parts of that body, on which those qualities, and all the other properties of gold depend" (Locke 1690, 13.6). Locke discusses real versus nominal essence in numerous passages of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, the most important of which are 2.31; 3.3; 3.6; 3.10; 4.6; and 4.12.

6 Currently, the subjects of agency, change, and determination are beginning to receive more careful consideration, especially from social constructionists. In my mind, one of the most impressive attempts to come to grips with this difficult series of problems is Paul Smith's *Discerning the Subject* (1988).

7 See "Così Fan Tutti" in Irigaray 1977a, and "Le Facteur de la Vérité" in Derrida 1980.

8 See MacCannell 1986, chapter one, and Ragland-Sullivan 1986, chapter five.

9 As we might expect, Derrida criticizes Lacan's adherence to the metaphysical privilege accorded to speech over writing. Idealism, Derrida argues, is lodged in Lacan's emphasis on *logos as phonē*, on the truth of the spoken word, on the privileging of voice and the vocalizable (see "Le Facteur de la Vérité" 1980, 413–96).

10 Benvenuto and Kennedy (1986, 10). These writers are correct to point out that most if not all psychoanalysts presume to have access to the "real" Freud; however, in a project as rigorously anti-essentialist as Lacan's, the retention of this mythology of the true Freud cannot be so easily dismissed—it must be *explained*.

11 Other early interrogations of phenomenology can be found in Derrida's introduction to Husserl's *L'Origine de la géométrie* (1962); "Form and Meaning: A Note on the Phenomenology of Language" (1972b); and "'Genesis and Structure' and Phenomenology" (1967c).

12 Derrida also provides a particularly incisive critique of Husserl's theory of signs. As a science, phenomenology is blind to its own medium, its own status as discourse; what is self-evident in Husserl's work, and therefore outside the realm of his phenomenological investigation, is precisely the materiality of language and the historicity of the sign.

13 Though we have come to associate this phrase with Derrida, it has, in fact, a more extended philosophical history. One can detect its recurrence in the works of such disparate theorists as Husserl, Heidegger, Althusser, and Lacan. For Derrida's discussion of Heidegger's use of "always already," see "The Ends of Man," 1972b, 124–25.

14 Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics* provides a particularly good example of how this locution can be used to dismiss entire schools of feminist thought—in Moi's case, to discredit "Anglo-American" feminism. Moi's sweeping criticism of writers

as diverse as Elaine Showalter, Myra Jehlen, Annette Kolodny, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar consists mainly in mapping out in detail the points in which their analyses "slip into" essentialism and therefore "reinscribe patriarchal humanism." Such an ostensibly anti-essentialist critique can only be built on the grounds of the twin assumptions that essentialism is, in essence, "patriarchal" and that "patriarchal humanism" has an essence which is inherently, inevitably reactionary.

2 Reading Like a Feminist

1 For Scholes's project to "save the referent," see "Reference and Difference" in *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English* (86–110).

2 See Paul Smith, "Men in Feminism: Men and Feminist Theory" (33–40); Stephen Heath, "Men in Feminism: Men and Feminist Theory" (41–46); Cary Nelson, "Men, Feminism: The Materiality of Discourse" (153–72); and Rosi Braidotti, "Envy: or With My Brains and Your Looks" (233–41), all in Jardine and Smith (1987).

3 For a more detailed reading of the constitution of the sexed subject, see Lacan's "The Mirror Stage" in *Écrits* (1–7).

4 For a summary statement of the collective's theoretical positions, see Guha (1984, vii–viii).

5 For this critique of essentialism in the Subaltern Studies group, see especially pp. 202–207.

6 The phrase is Naomi Schor's: "what is it to say that the discourse of sexual indifference/pure difference is not the last or (less triumphantly) the latest ruse of phallocentrism?" (1987, 109). This is implicitly a critique of Foucault's anti-essentialism, suggesting that both essentialism and anti-essentialism can have reactionary effects.

7 Schor's helpful definition of "reading double" as reading both for and beyond difference can be found in "Reading Double: Sand's Difference" (1986b, 250).

8 Spivak insists hers is merely a reading strategy and not a comprehensive theory. The distinction she makes between these two notions is not entirely clear: is it possible to employ a reading strategy *outside* a larger theoretical framework?

3 Monique Wittig's Anti-essentialist Materialism

1 I am reminded of Muhammed Ali's comment on the ERA: "some professions shouldn't be open to women because they can't handle certain jobs, like construction work. Lesbians, maybe, but not women." Cited in Alice Walker's "Breaking Chains and Encouraging Life" (1983, 287).

2 Chodorow does make the point that most women are heterosexual because the development of industrial capitalism has made primary relationships with women "rare" and "turned women (and men) increasingly and exclusively to conjugal family relationships for emotional support and love" (200). This thinking stands in sharp contradiction to recent gay theory which holds that it is precisely industrial capitalism which creates the new social and sexual relations necessary for the formation of a gay or lesbian identity. I will return to this important point in Chapter Six.