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CONTEMPORARY THEORIES OF POWER AND SUBJECTIVITY

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THEORIZING SUBJECTIVITY AND POWER

Theory does not develop out of the air. It is not the result of men of 'great ideas', 'brilliant minds', or 'astute observation'. It is the product of history, and thus requires an understanding of the socio-political and intellectual contexts out of which theories and knowledges develop. It is the result of the interwoven and mutual defining set of relations between one theory or discourse and many others. In this chapter, I will examine a number of recent theories of power (developed by men). This may help to assess the critical and constructive contributions feminism might have to make to the knowledges out of which it is formed and against which it rebels.

Feminist theory must always function in two directions if it is to effectively challenge patriarchal knowledges. On the one hand, it must engage in what could be called a *negative* or *reactive* project – the project of challenging what currently exists, or criticizing prevailing social, political, and theoretical relations. Without this negative or *anti-sexist* goal, feminist theory remains unanchored in and unrelated to the socio-theoretical *status quo*. It risks repeating problems of the past, especially patriarchal assumptions, without recognizing them as such. But if it remains *simply* reactive, *simply* a critique, it ultimately affirms the very theories it may wish to move beyond. It necessarily remains on the very ground it aims to contest. To say something is *not* true, valuable, or useful *without posing alternatives* is, paradoxically, to affirm that it *is* true, and so on. Thus coupled with this negative project, or rather, indistinguishable from it, must be a positive, constructive project: creating alternatives, producing *feminist*, not simply *anti-sexist*, theory. Feminist theory must exist as *both* critique *and* construct.

In other words, feminist theory should consider itself a form of *strategy*. Strategy involves recognizing the situation and alignments of power within and against which it operates. It needs to know its adversary intimately in order to strike at its most vulnerable points. It must also seek certain (provisional) goals and future possibilities with which it may replace

prevailing norms and ideals, demonstrating that they are not the only possibilities. They *can* be superseded.

As a series of strategic interventions into patriarchal social and theoretical paridigms, feminism must develop a versatile and wide-ranging set of conceptual tools and methodological procedures to arm itself defensively and offensively. It requires weapons to challenge patriarchal intellectual norms; and by which to protect itself against various counter-attacks from the existing regimes of power. Feminists can ignore the history and current conceptions of theories of human subjectivity only at their own peril. Feminist theory need not commit itself to the values and assumptions governing patriarchal knowledges; but in order to go *beyond* them, it must work through them, understand them, displace them in order to create a space of its own, a space designed and inhabited by women, capable of expressing their interests and values.

Feminist theory must thus undertake a kind of intellectual 'apprenticeship' in patriarchal knowledges in order to understand how they function, what presumptions they make, what procedures they rely upon, and what effects they produce. It must first develop a capacity to recognize patriarchal commitments in their underlying, as well as in more apparent, forms: to be able to recognize how the world is coded according to masculine or feminine attributes and associations, how knowledges, theories, discourses, function by excluding, expelling, or neglecting the contributions of femininity and women, producing lacks, gaps, absences about femininity which are necessary for these theories to operate; and how these theories distribute value according to the privileging of one sex over the other. In short, it must develop the capacity to recognize the patriarchal theories underlying *phallocentrism*. (For further discussion about phallocentrism, see chapter 5.) Phallocentrism occurs whenever the two sexes are represented by a singular – or 'human' (i.e. masculine) – model. The feminine is defined only in some relation to the masculine, and never autonomously, in its own terms. It is represented either as *the opposite* or other; or as a *complement*; or as the *same* as masculinity.

Second, feminist theory needs to address methodological questions, those about how patriarchal theories function and how feminists may utilize them *against themselves*. It is impossible to maintain or develop a theoretical 'purity' untainted by patriarchy for our ideas, values, terminology, repertoire of concepts are all products of patriarchy. Feminism does not necessarily require 'theoretical separatism', which attempts to eliminate patriarchal ingredients by isolation and distance. It can also result from a thorough familiarity with their methods, commitments, and values, and with their blind-spots, contradictory elements, and silences. A viable feminist methodology must be the consequence of an active yet critical engagement with patriarchal methods.

Third, feminists must use whatever remains worthwhile in patriarchal

discourses to create new theories, new methods, and values. This may imply taking patriarchal discourses as points of departure, allowing women's experiences rather than men's to select the objects and methods of investigation. By its very existence, such theory demonstrates that patriarchal paradigms are not *universal*, valid for all, but at best represent one point of view.

It is within this general context of the relations between phallocentric and feminist discourses that I will situate the following outlines of four contemporary (male) theorists of subjectivity and power – Louis Althusser, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. They develop accounts of social, discursive, and individual relations of power that, between them, provide a context and targets for French feminisms.[1]

Althusser and Lacan are major contributors to an anti-biologistic, anti-naturalistic, and, above all, anti-humanist theory of subjectivity. They provide crucial elements in accounting for the *social construction of subjectivity*. Although critical of them, Foucault and Derrida can be seen to contribute a discursive and political dimension to the two earlier theorists. Clearly, none of them could be considered feminist (they do not, for example, raise the question of patriarchal power structures); yet each has provided inspiration for many feminists. Rarely, however, are their works uncritically or wholeheartedly accepted. Generally, feminists have subjected them to critical assessment and use these texts to develop their own.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Althusser, Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida are four French theorists whose works can be related, if not to a common content, then at least to a common context, that of French philosophy. Our first question is thus: *why French theory?* There are two major reasons why, instead of looking at an Anglo-American framework, which would presumably be more relevant to English-speaking feminists, we examine the work of a number of difficult, even esoteric and eccentric, French theorists. First, French philosophy has been extremely, even disproportionately, influential in twentieth-century accounts of human subjectivity and socio-political functioning – in the same way that English and German philosophies transformed knowledge in the nineteenth century (via Liberalism and Marxism respectively). Second, the works of these and other French intellectuals have been extremely influential in the development of feminist theory, beginning with Simone de Beauvoir's landmark text, *The Second Sex* (1972). French feminisms provide a major alternative to American liberal feminism and reveal a more British orientation to Marxist-feminism. It is difficult to see how French feminisms could be assessed by and useful to us without some understanding of the issues and intellectual contexts of twentieth-century thought.

While necessarily schematic and compressed, the following overview positions the four male theorists we are examining in the milieu out of which they developed. The crucial dividing line I will present is May and June 1968,[2] demarcating two generations of French intellectuals. The first generation was preoccupied with a 'debate' between Existentialism, phenomenology, or humanism on the one hand (perhaps best represented by Jean-Paul Sartre); and, on the other, Marxism. Sartre published *Being and Nothingness* in 1943, making explicit the basic commitments of humanism. Humanism is the theory that all value and meaning, history and cultural production are the products of human consciousness and the lived experiences of individuals. Phenomenology and Existentialism espouse the primacy of experiences, subjectivity, and individuality in social and interpersonal life. For Existentialism, the human being is defined by his or her capacity for freedom, to make choices and decisions regarding the meaning and value of one's life (Sartre 1975).

In opposition to humanism, which it denounces as idealist and individualistic, the position of the French Communist Party (the PCF) was defined in economic terms. Class struggle is the motor of history and the explanation of cultural production. Capitalism is a system beyond the control of individuals. It exhibits an internal logic – the dialectic – which inevitably progresses towards the dissolution of class structures, social and economic revolution, and the creation of a new, egalitarian order. Classes are conceived purely economically, the economy being regarded as the cause and explanation of the nature of its cultural and ideological infrastructure. The PCF aimed to lead the working classes in a takeover of the state, the means, and forces of production.

Existentialism and economistic Marxism are two extremes of radical political thought during the Cold War in the 1950s. By 1961, however, Sartre was moving closer to a compromise position. He attempted to embrace Marxism in the texts *The Search for a Method* and *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*. There, he links Marxist and Existentialist concerns through the concept of *praxis*: the practice of individual and group (class) subjects who, through their conscious, concerted efforts, are capable of transforming oppressive structures. Existentialism was itself transformed by Sartre's acknowledgement that class oppression may be a mitigating factor on human freedom (although significantly Sartre seemed to ignore de Beauvoir's re-inscription of Sartre's position by acknowledging women's oppression); as was Marxism, which was 'humanized'. In sum, by the 1960s, Marxism, in both its economistic and its humanist forms, dominated the field of political theory and action.

Coupled with these alliances and interactions was the rediscovery of the 'sacred' texts of the ninteenth century – Hegel, Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche. These figures were instrumental in the emergence of each of our four contemporary theorists. Althusser, with whom we will begin, sees his

work as a reading, a reinvestigation of the texts of Marx. Ignored by dogmatic, received interpretations, Marx's work, particularly *Capital*, had not been read as a *scientific* account of historical and economic relations.

ALTHUSSER AND THE THEORY OF IDEOLOGY

Althusser challenges humanism, particularly Sartrean versions, by claiming that consciousness at best provides merely a subjective or 'personal' view of reality, a view which does not usually conform to objective social relations. In order to transform subjective experience into objective knowledge, a scientific analysis, such as Marx provided, is necessary. Althusser's conception differentiates the lived experiences of individuals from the real economic and social relations in which they live. He divides information into the category of science, which is truthful, objective knowledge of social relations; and ideology, which is the personal experience of individuals and/or groups. For him, consciousness is not a reliable index of social reality but its distorted or false representation.

On the other hand, Althusser also rejected determinism and the economic reductionism involved in more dogmatic versions of Marxism: while social and cultural products depend on economic conditions, economic relations are not adequate to explain them. They exert a 'relative autonomy' from economic relations. Althusser utilizes the traditional Marxist metaphor of the social formation as a building which requires a strong base or foundation (provided by the economic forces, the forces and relations of production); on to this foundation two more storeys can be added (jointly constituting the ideological and cultural superstructure). The first floor is the legal and political system, the state and the law; the second floor is made up of various cultural practices, including moral, religious, educational, familial, and ethical systems. The two upper floors are supported, 'in the last instance' by the economic base, but are not directly determined by it.

Ideology mutually defines and interacts with the economic sphere, so that while the economic is the condition for ideology, the ideological also provides a 'relative determination' of the economic. Economistic Marxism assumes that if upheavals at the economic level occur, this *in itself* will provide the conditions for an accompanying ideological upheaval. For Althusser, given the relative autonomy of ideology, this is by no means clear.

His anti-humanism refuses any notion of a pre-given subjectivity, free of ideology, and his anti-economism accords an autonomy to socio-cultural practices. Together these influence a surprisingly large number of feminists. Many saw in Marxist analyses of class relations a striking analogy with women's patriarchal oppression.

Althusser also helped alert feminists, even Marxist-feminists, to the

phallocentric assumption that women's identities are somehow *natural*. His anti-humanism and his account of the social construction of subjectivity in and by ideology propelled many feminists away from natural or biological accounts of women's identities towards social, cultural, and historical explanations. His anti-economism, on the other hand, proposed that cultural, artistic, communicational, and representational systems, i.e. ideologies, do not automatically follow economic changes. They themselves must be subjected to a thoroughgoing analysis and subversion, if questions about personal identity, interpersonal relations, or, more generally, about everyday life (such as those asked by feminists about women's everyday experiences of oppression) are to be resolved. In other words, while problematizing personal experience by describing it as ideological rather than truthful, Althusser enables women's experiences to be still taken seriously. He shifts the *status* of experience, so that it is no longer guaranteed a truth-value but acts as *symptom* of a deeper, underlying, or latent structure. His claim is not that of Descartes, that our experiences deceive us, but rather, that we must learn how to 'read' them other than by taking them at their face value.

Althusser aims to develop a *scientific* account of ideology, one that positions ideology and its effects clearly in a socio-economic context. His analysis of ideology has two components. One is epistemological and involves the distinction between science and ideology as ways of knowing; and the other, psychological and sociological, involving his notion that ideology creates or constitutes subjects.

The science/ideology distinction

The distinction between science and ideology is Althusser's attempt to justify Marxism as a scientific account of history and class relations and psychoanalysis as a scientific account of psychical organization, making them stand out against their ideological rivals, liberal political theory, classical and neo-classical economics, and empirical psychologies, respectively. These pseudosciences or ideologies rationalize existing class relations, and thus, ultimately function to obscure rather than reveal real relations. In opposition to these unreflective, ideological knowledges, Althusser claims that Marxism not only provides a truthful account of real class relations, but also explains the ideological investments of competing knowledges – why and where they go wrong.

He argues that Marx's understanding of history – historical materialism – must be distinguished from empiricist and idealist accounts, in so far as historical materialism presumes a revolutionary rupture in classical history, an 'epistemological break', marking itself as scientific and its rivals as ideological. It typifies the inaugurating process involved in all sciences: science is marked by a particular relation to its objects, whether these are

numbers (in mathematics), matter (in physics or chemistry), or individual and social behaviour (in the social sciences). A scientific approach is initiated when the evidence provided by observation, the senses, or consciousness is discounted from the status of knowledge. Science, in other words, *constructs* or produces its objects. Ideology, by contrast, takes pre-given objects, objects given to consciousness, as its foundation:

> The critical work performed by Marx upon the texts of English economists may be described as *productive* work in the literal sense of the word – a transformation of raw material culminating in a finished product. Marx produces knowledge . . . by working on a raw material which is not something 'real', revealing itself in phenomenological experience, but an ideological discourse upon the real – the discourse of political economy. We may therefore say that a science is the knowledge of the *ideology* from which it springs . . .; and it *is* this knowledge as a result of its having transformed the ideological material.
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> (Descombes 1980, p. 121; cf. Althusser 1971, chapter 1)

Althusser does not consider science in empiricist terms. Thus historical materialism is not true or false in terms of what empirically occurs to verify or falsify it. It is scientific because of its *internal* operations, its mode of ordering statements and procedures to produce its investigative objects. Sciences are 'theoretical practices', forms of labour analogous to the production of commodities. Ideologies leave their given objects untransformed. Science, by contrast, is the labour of producing an object, transforming raw materials provided by consciousness or observation into the appropriate object of theoretical analysis. Ideology represents 'objects' according to pre-given class values and power relations; science produces an object that explains the real (i.e. class) basis of ideologies as well.

Althusser draws an analogy between scientific knowledge and economic production. Both are processes involving raw materials, procedures for transforming these materials, and products – commodities in one case, and scientific theories and propositions in the other. Both must be regarded as determinate, concrete, material *practices*. Instead of being construed as a creative, or purely intellectual, accomplishments, Althusser claimed that the sciences are made up of transformed, worked-upon materials, concepts, language, theories, and frameworks. These are not the results of cerebral, 'private', insight or intention, but are processes 'without a subject'. In order to understand science and its production and history, we need make no reference to the individuality or subjectivity of the scientist. The scientist is no more than an agent or single point within a far more complex network of connections making science possible. Historical materialism takes the data of classical economics as its raw materials, transforming them so that they make clear the implicit ideological interests

they serve, and developing beyond them a scientific explanation for economic and historical relations.

Scientific theories have a dialectical relation to political practice. Althusser regards knowledge as *prior* to practice, guiding, informing, and directing it appropriately, or providing it with an 'intelligence' or purpose in its goals; and *after* practice, as a mode of reflection and criticism, a form of analysis and assessment. Theory is thus a precondition of *guided*, directed practice *and* a form of retrospective analysis or reflection:

> Philosophy (or theory) represents the people's struggle in theory. In return it helps people to distinguish in *theory*, and in all *ideas* (political, ethical, aesthetic, etc.) between true and false ideas. In principle, true ideas always serve the people; false ideas serve the enemies of the people.
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> (Althusser 1971, p. 24)

Ideology always operates in the interests of the ruling class and against those of the working class; it obscures social relations, and their bases in class domination, presenting a false or distorted picture of them. It is a system (or several) for distorting the real relations of power.

On the basis of the opposition between science and ideology, Althusser claims that Marxism, in the context of history and class relations, and psychoanalysis, in the context of psychical and individual behaviour, are sciences which are distinct from the ideological functioning of liberal political theory, classical economics, and empirical psychology. These sciences construct and produce class relations and the unconscious as their respective objects of scientific investigation.

Ideology and the production of subjects

Althusser's account of the construction of subjects in and by ideology is found in his paper 'Ideology and ideological state apparatuses' (Althusser 1971). There he examines the ways in which a society ensures the production and reproduction of its necessary conditions of existence. It must reproduce both the material/technical components of production – raw materials, tools, machines, technological instruments – and the labour-power needed to work them. Every society must ensure a relative continuity through successive generations. It must be able to guarantee that a certain kind of subject is produced, with the appropriate skills and capacities needed for the production process.

His interest in the social construction of subjectivity distinguishes his work from economistic and humanist versions of Marxism. For the former, individuality is a determinate effect of economic processes; the socio-cultural and ideological systems are more or less predictable effects of

economic relations. For the latter, the subject, the individual, is taken as natural, pre-given, and in no need of explanation. Althusser analyses the processes of socialization that instill attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour as desirable for individuals. Socially appropriate subjects need to acquire various technical and interpersonal skills, the internalization of various attitudes and a submission to dominant value-systems. It requires not just 'know-how', but also 'subjection to the ruling ideology'.

Subjects are not usually subjected to coercive or external forces (although coercive forms of repression do of course occur). Althusser calls these 'Repressive State Apparatuses' (RSAs), and includes military, police, legal, punitive systems under this category; more internalized, less coercive ideological systems – Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) – usually produce social subjectivity. The RSAs generally function by violence and force, while the ISAs function by ideas, values, ideologies which, if they rely on violence, are more insidious and less visible than the RSAs. Althusser includes religious, educational, familial, political, communicational, and cultural institutions under the category of ISAs. Between them, these two state apparatuses ensure that there is a harmony between the requirements of a socio-economic system and the subjects it thereby produces.

He distinguishes between ideology in general, and particular ideologies. Particular ideologies are always explicable in terms of specific class positions and the concrete histories of a particular social formation. They are determinate systems of value, rationalizations, for the interests of the dominant class. These ideologies vary widely over time and from culture to culture; they cannot be generally characterized except that they express the interests and values of the dominant class. They must be distinguished from ideology in general which, he claims, 'has no *history*' (Althusser 1971, p. 150).

In this sense, ideology is 'omnipresent' and 'transhistorical', necessary in all cultures. Each must ensure the reproduction of subjects appropriate to its ongoing maintenance and development. Even after a revolutionary upheaval of capitalism and its replacement by socialism, society would require socialized subjects. Each particular culture does this in specific ways which require concrete historical analysis. Althusser himself focuses on the concept of ideology in general. He advances two theses concerning it: 'Thesis I: Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' (Althusser 1971, p. 153); and 'Thesis II: Ideology has a material existence' (Althusser 1971, p. 155). These will be separately discussed.

As an imaginary representation of 'men's' real social relations, Althusser's model of ideology differs from other accounts: ideology as collusion or as alienation. For him, ideology is not the creation of a ruling clique (capitalists, the media, multinational corporations, etc.) who somehow

have access to the truth but can fool the majority into believing false representations. Ideology is thus *not* the result of a conspiracy or collusion of those in power. Nor is it a function of an alienation specific to capitalism that would somehow disappear 'after the revolution', like a veil being removed to reveal the real object underneath. Because ideology is eternal, it cannot be overthrown by liberation or enlightenment. It is a *necessary condition* of existence for all cultures that there be an inculcation of cultural values into its social agents. *Ideology is the system of representation by means of which we live in cultures as their products and agents*. This explains why there must be a naturalizing, neutralizing process by which what is culturally desirable is presented as given or obvious, unquestionable. The contents of consciousness are ideological in this sense; they are composed of what is considered self-evident, inevitable, and natural.

While *lived* as natural, ideological representations cannot be regarded as purely natural, inevitable, merely intellectual, conceptual, or mental processes. Ideas do not come from nowhere, but are produced in concrete material practices, which are themselves products of various institutions, including the ISAs: '[the subject's] . . . ideas are his *material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by material, ideological apparatus which derive the ideas of that subject*' (Althusser 1971, p. 158; emphasis in the original).

For any individual subject within bourgeois ideology, the individual presumes it thinks for itself, that ideas are the products of its own inspiration, experience, or consciousness. Believing ideas are freely chosen and thus capable of rejection, each will consider itself self-made. This is a subject that regards its social world and interrelations with others as peripheral to its subjectivity or identity. In opposition to this naturalistic self-conception, Althusser maintains that the subject is the (contradictory) product of institutions, practices, and value systems that produce and validate some ideas and denigrate or exclude others. What the subject believes are products of his or her own thoughts are in fact produced elsewhere (in the ISAs) and serve political and class interests in obscured but unconscious form.

If particular ideologies reproduce the values and interests of culturally specific social groups, ideology in general serves one overall function: its task is to constitute or construct individuals as subjects, transforming biological 'raw materials' into social subjects who function in the society in which they are born. *The function of ideology is the transformation or interpellation of biological individuals into social subjects*. On the one hand, ideology creates a pre-designated space into which the future subject will fit, a place in culture as so-and-so's child, a member of such-and-such a class, etc. On the other hand, ideology functions to concretize the future subject by submitting it to various ISAs (Althusser

specifies the power of the family–school nexus in contemporary capitalism) so that this subject concretely fills the abstract position to which it was allocated.

To summarize Althusser's understanding of ideology and power relations, we can say:

1 Ideology is not simply a series of empirical events but a highly developed social structure.
2 As a social structure, it distorts and obscures, neutralizes and renders invisible various class or power relations.
3 It is a reflection of the values and interests of dominant social classes.
4 It is a system of ideas, practices, beliefs, and values that are presented as obvious or natural.
5 It is produced in and by various ISAs – the institutions, rituals, and practices comprising the socio-cultural life of any society. In this sense, it is material.
6 It produces social subjects by transforming biological raw materials into social subjects.
7 In this productive process, it obscures the processes by which the subject is constituted, enabling the subject to consider itself self-produced or naturally given.
8 Ideology functions by a recognition and a misrecognition: the subject recognizes/misrecognizes itself in the institutions and practices that constitute it and in the positions that have been pre-designated for it.
9 Ideology has an external existence in so far as all culture must socialize subjects; and
10 Only a scientific, objective analysis of social class and power relations can explain, if not undo, the effects of ideology.

Althusser and feminism

Althusser's work has had a powerful effect on feminist theory, particularly Marxist-feminism, for a number of reasons:

(a) He signals the relevance of Marx's work to feminist concerns, even those outside economic issues. He showed that Marxism was capable of explaining wide-ranging cultural, social, and personal issues. In particular, he situated a major object of feminist interrogation – the nuclear family – in a broader socio-economic framework, so that it could be regarded as *symptomatic* of an underlying economic structure while not being itself economically determined. The family could be analysed in terms of its structural role in producing or reproducing social values, including patriarchal and capitalist values. A whole range of institutions previously analysed discretely – the family, the educational system, the media, religion, and all the ISAs – do not

function to benefit or enlighten individuals. They are agencies for the transmission of and inculcation into a series of values that are necessary for various social and power relations to continue. Although Althusser only indicates how the ISAs function, individually or in co-operation, many feminists have found his notions of the 'relative autonomy' of ISAs and yet their determination 'in the last instance' by economic relations extremely fruitful in detailing women's positions within culture. He demonstrated they can be analysed without resorting to empiricist, descriptive, or 'personalized' views of these institutions, or 'objective', 'scientific' analyses based on generalized statistical terms. He showed that the family, for example, could be analysed as a structure which both functions within a larger totality (the social whole) and itself provides a structured framework for smaller sub-elements (the individuals reared by and living within the family). It could be detailed in its analysis without sacrificing the broader perspectives of social and psychological effects.

(b) He showed that Marx's account of society was in principle compatible with a more individualistic, psychologically oriented account, such as that offered by Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalysis. In Lacan's reading of Freud (see next section) he saw an analogous project to his own rereading of Marx: the revelation of a generally repressed *scientific core* misrecognized by more conservative followers. He helped to establish a powerful trajectory also of concern to feminists: the bringing together of a 'macroscopic' social theory with a 'microscopic' theory of individuality; the linking of private and public spheres.[3]

(c) His anti-humanism, his critique of individualism and his adoption of a structural and scientific model of the individual and society have been utilized by many feminists to explain the operations of patriarchal ideology. For example, acts of discrimination against women could be regarded, using Althusser's notion of structural determination, not simply as random actions committed by aggressive individuals, but as an inbuilt feature of an entire social system. Women's oppression need not be seen as a conscious process of oppression perpetrated by a few (or many) misogynists because of their irrational hatred of women. It is the result of various social *structures* unconsciously reproduced by both men and women, independent of their personalities or choice. To blame social structures for supporting and requiring oppression does not absolve capitalists (or men) who benefit from it, even if they did not conspire to create it.

(d) Above all, his understanding of ideology as a systematically integrated co-operation of practices, social rules, ideals, and values as a system of representation of dominant values under the guise of nature or inevitability, provided many feminists with a conceptual framework for analysing patriarchal ideology (and, for some, its integration with bourgeois ideology).

Althusser's wide-ranging impact on feminist theory, both within and beyond France, helped to direct feminists away from humanist and liberal arguments about women's equality, towards a more structural account of oppression. A common tendency of the feminism of the 1960s, the categorization of men as villains and women as their victims, became transformed into examining the social system and its various institutions. Since his revitalization of Marx (although clearly he is not the only one responsible), feminists have had to confront the question of the interrelation of women's oppression and class domination – of patriarchy with capitalism – generating a number of debates about whether a thorough analysis of capitalism could explain the oppression of women, or whether capitalism is a distinct system overlaid on patriarchy. These debates are still strong preoccupations, and form a pivotal point around which Liberal, Radical and Marxist feminisms are distinguished (Kuhn and Wolpe 1978; Eisenstein 1979; Barrett 1980).[4]

However, partly as a result of his own published self-criticisms, partly as a result of his role in the events of May–June 1968,[5] and partly as a result of 'personal' events in his life,[6] his work has fallen into disrepute. Since the mid-1970s, his work has tended to be ignored by Marxists and Marxist-feminists. Yet in spite of being rarely mentioned by name, he remains an important, if unacknowledged, source of contemporary accounts of power. He is the implicit object of many critical and conforming accounts of subjectivity and power, as we will see in outlining Foucault's work.

I will return to Althusser (and the other male theorists discussed here) towards the end of this chapter.

LACAN, THE UNCONSCIOUS AND SEXUALITY

Jacques Lacan is arguably the most controversial and charismatic psychoanalyst since Freud himself. He presents a series of scrupulously detailed readings of Freud's texts, which have proved to be a major source of inspiration for Althusser's account of ideology, as well as for contemporary French feminisms – and, through their influences on Juliet Mitchell's text, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974), for Anglo-American and Australian feminist theory as well.

English-speaking feminists considered Freud to be the epitome of all that was misogynistic and irksome in patriarchal theories. This antipathy was understandable given that received interpretations of Freud's by-now highly popularized work were largely based on neo-Freudian revisionism. Anglo-American analysis was dominated by 'ego psychology', which Lacan described as a 'psychology of free enterprise'. Ego psychology aimed to strengthen the ego of the patient or analysand, and thereby to strengthen and reinforce the super-ego or conscience through an identification with the figure of the analyst. These versions of psychoanalysis remain

fundamentally conservative. Taking the social context for granted, it functions to reintegrate individuals back into these given social contexts. By contrast, Lacan aimed to draw attention to what is most threatening and subversive in Freud's work, especially in his understanding of the unconscious, which is almost completely ignored in ego psychology.[7] Feminists in the 1960s, so Mitchell claimed, had either not read Freud's own texts but had substituted mediated, 'revised', or 'updated' versions or read Freud filtered through the lens of ego psychology. Those forms of theory and therapy criticized by feminists as forms of readapting women (and men) to their preordained social roles were not in fact those developed by Freud.

Feminists may also have ignored Freud's work because, during the 1960s and early 1970s, the question of *how to read a text*, how the politics of interpretation functions, had not been adequately raised. Freud's work can be read in a number of different ways – it can be taken literally/ empirically/ descriptively; it can be read symptomatically, i.e. in terms of what it does not say but must presume; or it could be read 'psychoanalytically', in terms of multiple meaning, ambiguity, indirection, displacement. Mitchell's feminist vindication of Freud consisted in arguing that his work should be read or interpreted other than as an apologist for patriarchal power relations. He does not advocate a patriarchal society; he merely describes it. Mitchell's reading of Freud and the rekindling of feminist interest in Freud's work were largely an effect of Lacan's idiosyncratic yet powerful lectures on and readings of Freud.

Lacan's reading displaces psychoanalysis from the medical moral, biological, and normative framework of ego psychology by placing it within the context of philosophical, literary, and semiotic theory. Viewed from this perspective, Freud's work can be seen as a challenge to the norms governing western knowledges since Descartes. With few exceptions, western reason presumes a unified, rational, and self-knowing or conscious subject. Literary analysis and criticism, and traditional (empiricist forms of) linguistics presume a transparent language that enables communication between subjects and truthful representations of reality. Lacan stresses the subversion of consciousness of the pre-given subject and the problematization of truth and knowledge effected in Freud's account of the 'split subject' – a subject irremediably divided between a consciousness which believes it is the centre of subjectivity, and an unconscious which continually subverts this claim through its existence outside and beyond the awareness of consciousness. Freud demonstrated that the subject is *incapable* of knowing or mastering itself. Placing psychoanalysis within the register of language and signification, he positions Freud's 'discovery' of the unconscious in the explanatory context of language. This is encapsulated in his most famous dictum: 'the unconscious is structured like a language'.

The symbolic and the imaginary

Freud's work rests on two interconnected cornerstones: an account of the unconscious as inaccessible and radically other to consciousness; and an account of the production of sexuality, especially of the psychical distinction between the sexes. These two elements are bound together by Freud's understanding of the Oedipus complex and castration threat.

Lacan regards both as effects of the subject's immersion in and alienation by language and signification. Subjectivity, sexuality, and the unconscious are functions of the material play of language, regulated by what Lacan calls the symbolic order. The symbolic is the domain constituting social law, language, and exchange – the domain of the social. This order is governed, according to Lacan, by the Other (with a capital 'O'). The Other is not a person, but a place, a locus from which language emanates and is given meaning. Misidentified with God, the Other is incarnated in human experience in the figure of the Symbolic Father – the authority that real fathers invoke to institute the law. This law is fundamental to patriarchy, even if it is not, as Lacan claims, a universal cultural condition: the law forbidding (mother–son) incest – the law of exogamy. The Symbolic Father is 'he' who is invoked as castrator when the boy transgresses this law. The symbolic order is the social field, as regulated by the law of the father. When the boy takes up a position within the symbolic, he internalizes this law as the unconscious in an act of primal repression.[8]

Sexuality and desire are not governed by a path of 'natural' development or regulated by instincts. They are structured and organized by the key signifier of the symbolic order – the phallus. For Lacan, the phallus is not an organ, nor the symbol of an organ, but a *signifier*. Signifiers are the material components of language composed of phonemes in speech, or graphemes in writing. The phallus is an element of language, a term within a system which circulates terms, exchanging them between subjects. The phallus is the threshold signifier to the symbolic order, and the crucial signifier in representing the distinction between the sexes. As a signifier, no one can possess, own, or control the phallus for it exists only by virtue of its circulation within the symbolic order. Each sex nevertheless confuses the signifier with a part or the whole of its body, and in doing so acquires a position as having (for the male) or being (for the female) the phallus. The male is construed as having the phallus because of his 'possession' of the penis. Because the female is construed as castrated, as 'lacking' this much-valued organ, she becomes the (passive) object of men's desires, a phallus for him. The woman *is* the phallus and the man *has* the phallus only through the desire of the other. The desire of the other is in fact the desire for meaning and significance to mark and structure the body, constituting it as social (patriarchal). Women's status as the object of the other's desire is

a compensation for her perceived status as castrated. Only if women *lack* the phallus can men be considered to have it; and because of her castrated position, she aspires to *be* it.

Lacan's account of the symbolic is dependent on a (logically and chronologically) prior order, the imaginary. His earliest works were directed towards the question of the birth of the ego or sense of self in a phase that he called 'the mirror-stage'. His theory of the mirror-stage is an account of the primal separation of mother and child and the laying of the foundations of social and linguistic identity. It marks the child's entry into the order of images, the imaginary.

The mirror-stage begins at about six months of age. Until this time, the child has no concept of self and no boundaries separating it from the world or from others. The sense of separateness begins only when the ego is being formed. Lacan elaborates Freud's paper 'On narcissism: an introduction' (1914), where Freud outlines the genesis of the ego through the phenomenon of narcissism. Lacan argues that the ego is not the result of maturation or biology but is the specific effect of the child's recognition of the mother's absence, which designates a lack in the child's previously full relation to the world. This phase becomes apparent in the child's joyous recognition of its own image in a mirror. It not only recognizes this as an image of itself, it identifies with the image, internalizing it and investing it with libido. The ego is the result of the child's narcissistic investment in its corporeal image. The internalized image, or *imago*, provides the child with an illusory sense of wholeness or completeness and unity. It is illusory in so far as the child *experiences* a sense of fragmentation and disunity, which Lacan describes as the 'body-in-bits-and-pieces', the uncoordinated, developmentally incomplete organization of its sensory and motor capacities.

Lacan regards the mirror-stage and the imaginary order as sexually undifferentiated, analogous to Freud's account of pre-Oedipal sexuality. Masculinity and femininity and their bases in the anatomical differences between the sexes are not yet understood by the child. The child's acquisition of a determinate sexual identity occurs only with its entry into the symbolic with the Oedipus complex. The mirror-stage introduces the child to an identity and an idea of its separateness from the world of others. It provides a border or boundary defined by the child's skin. But the identity and unity the mirror-stage and the imaginary offer are precarious, for the identity is modelled only on the other, an ego as a function of the alter-ego. If identity is first posed for the child at the time of the mirror-stage, it is not yet stable or definitive. If the self is modelled on the other, it is necessarily interpersonal, based on identifications with others. It is thus, Lacan stresses, a paranoid and alienated construct. The ego is always an other, always split between an illusory stability and unity and a recognition of the power of the other in defining the self.

The imaginary mother–child dyad needs to be mediated for the child to gain a place in the symbolic. This occurs through the intervention of a third party, one outside the imaginary identifications binding the ego to the other. This third term is the Symbolic Father, representing the law prohibiting incest. It ensures that the child gives up the mother to enter the social world of law, language, and exchange. Only at this point does the distinction between the sexes become evident to the child.

Like Freud, Lacan concentrates largely on the boy's symbolic development. The apparently complementary processes in the girl remain obscure. In accepting the father's law, exemplified by the threat of castration, the boy identifies with paternal authority and represses his desire for his mother. In identifying with the father, he establishes a super-ego. With the creation of the super-ego and the (primal) repression of the desire for the mother, the unconscious is formed. He becomes a subject, an 'I' able to function within a (patriarchal) symbolic system.

The girl must also abandon her mother and thus her primary, homosexual attachment, transferring her object of desire from the mother to the phallus, and thus to the father whom she presumes 'has' it. In acknowledging her castration, she desires the phallus she lacks. In this case, Lacan is explicit in asserting that the phallus is *not* a biological organ, but access to the signifier of desire and authority. She comes to acquire the traits associated with femininity under patriarchy – passivity, seductiveness, the renunciation of active, clitoral sexuality and its transformation into passive, vaginal sexuality. She is not constructed, as is the boy, as an active, desiring subject but as a passive, desired object (of the other's desire). *She is positioned in the symbolic order as a spoken exchanged object, not as a subject who is a partner within exchange.*

The unconscious structured like a language

In spite of his claim to be merely deciphering and interpreting Freud, Lacan's reading is a considerable departure from Freud. Lacan claims that if Freud had been aware of linguistics, and especially the work of Ferdinand de Saussure,[9] he could have seen the unconscious in linguistic/semiotic form. The contents and processes of the unconscious can be very precisely charted using the distinctions between signifier and signified, and various rhetorical figures, particulary metaphor and metonymy.[10]

Although we can have no direct access to the unconscious because of repression, nevertheless the unconscious creates compromises through which it can express itself in consciousness. These symptoms – dreams, slips, jokes, accidents, neurotic symptoms – are inexplicable in conscious terms, but can be meaningfully deciphered using the postulate of the unconscious as their 'true' source. The unconscious is an explanatory

hypothesis needed to understand those conscious phenomena that consciousness is incapable of explaining.

Freud conceived of the unconscious as a storehouse of wishes, images, fantasies that are unacceptable to consciousness. Its nucleus consists in infantile, usually Oedipal, incestual wishes, sexual impulses directed toward the mother and/or hostile aggressive impulses towards the father. The repression of these Oedipal wishes is the object of *primal* repression, which creates a permanent barrier dividing the unconscious from consciousness, being itself impervious to conscious scrutiny. With primal repression, there is also a retrospective repression of the memory of pre-Oedipal wishes related to the repressed Oedipal wish. As their repository, the unconscious is a permanent storage system governed by its own rules and procedures. In his paper 'The unconscious' (1914), Freud cites four defining features of the unconscious:

(a) It is governed by primary processes (i.e. condensation and displacement). These function according to the pleasure principle, which seeks immediate satisfaction for wishes, independent of their viability in reality. Displacement disguises unconscious wishes by transferring their intensity and meaning to relatively innocuous preconscious ideas, which can thus function as their distorted representatives. Condensation also helps disguise forbidden wishes by representing several unconscious contents through a single preconscious image, effecting great compression using an *economy of omission*. By means of distorting and disguising functions, the forbidden unconscious wish gains some satisfaction. The primary processes have a freely mobile energy or libidinal cathexis, which can be directed to more socially useful outlets when regulated by the secondary processes. These constitute those preconscious and conscious activities dominated by the reality principle. If primary processes aim for immediate discharge and satisfaction of libidinal drives, secondary processes aim to inhibit these energies, deferring their satisfaction for more (socially) approved contexts, using their energies for social production.

(b) The unconscious is thus dominated by the pleasure principle, while the preconscious and consciousness are governed by the reality principle. Indeed, the unconscious is unable to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Its contents and wishes carry no index of their origin. They may never have existed in reality, but because the unconscious is incapable of separating actual from wished-for events, it also contains ideas only fantasized and never experienced in actuality.

(c) There are *no* relations between unconscious contents. Each wish or idea exists side-by-side with others, but is incapable of being modified by them. There are thus no logical or conceptual connections: there is no form of contradiction, no negation, no degrees of doubt or certainty,

no probabilities. All these are preconscious forms of qualification or evaluation. In the unconscious, there are only contents, charged with greater or lesser intensity or energy. The absence of an organizing relation between unconscious contents may help explain the ingenious devices (punning, multiple meaning, ambiguity, anagrams, metaphors, etc.) the unconscious wish must utilize in order to gain conscious expression.

(d) The unconscious is non-temporal. Memories do not fade with the passage of time, but retain the force they had at the time they were repressed. Nor is there any chronological organization of unconscious contents, they are not organized in terms of earlier or later. It is for this reason that the unconscious remains largely infantile even if these wishes are inappropriate or impossible in adult life (e.g. where the desired object is dead).

Given these characteristics, the unconscious functions entirely differently to consciousness. Consciousness is hostile and alien to these unconscious wishes; it resists their aim of conscious expression. It is for this reason that the wish requires distortion and disguise to enter the conscious system. Lacan attempts to integrate these Freudian insights into a linguistic framework, distinguishing the unconscious discourse from the discourses of consciousness.

For Lacan, while consciousness is articulated by means of grammatical and syntactical organization, the unconscious is a system which does not obey these rules. Through repression, signs are reduced to signifiers – i.e. they are quite literally robbed of their meaning, detached from their signifieds. *Repression is thus the robbery of meaning; it is the severing of the significance of the sign.* Freud himself described repression as a failure of translation. Lacan expresses this failure as the splitting of a signifier from signified. The unconscious is thus unable to speak in its own voice and vocabulary. It can only speak through and by means of conscious discourse. It is not the smooth, continuous unfolding of meaning; rather, it is expressed as silence, verbal slips, stutterings, gaps, and puns.

Freudian primary processes, condensation and displacement, are explained by Lacan using Roman Jakobson's distinction between metaphor and metonymy. For Lacan, condensation is explicable as metaphor. It consists in utilizing terms related by similarity so that one is capable of taking the place of the other, the first, now latent, signifier delegating its meaning to the second. Displacement can be regarded on the model of metonymy, which consists in utilizing terms related by contiguity, one transferring its intensity to the other. As a movement from one contiguous signifier to the next, metonymy is the model for the movement of *desire*. (Desire is the substitutability of one object for another, the capacity to displace the (lost) original object of desire – the mother, the mother's

breast – by a potentially infinite chain of alternatives.) Metaphor and metonymy enable the unconscious to be mapped using only the discourses of the analysand. It is for this reason psychoanalysis has been described as 'the talking cure': its methods, objectives, and procedures are all features of language.

Lacan and feminism

Lacan's work has generated a good deal of controversy in feminist circles. Many French feminists remain unswervingly loyal to his work, arguing that he presents one of the most astute analyses of patriarchal social requirements, and one of the most stringent criticisms of mainstream, logocentric, and phallocentric knowledges (e.g. Clement, Lemaire, Kristeva). Others, while taking his work seriously, remain highly critical, seeing it as a less obvious but equally insidious version of Freud's phallocentrism. This range of attitudes is also reflected in Anglo-American feminisms. Clearly in the limited space available here, this intricate debate cannot be adequately discussed, let alone resolved. Nevertheless, some of the ways in which his work continues to be relevant to contemporary feminist theory can be outlined in point form. More critical remarks will be developed at the end of this chapter.

(a) Lacan elaborates the major role that language, metaphor, metonymy, and the play of signification exert in the formation of the unconscious and in the principles governing its interpretation. The unconscious, desire, and sexuality are not effects of nature, biology, or some human essence, but are consequences of the human subject's constitution in and by the symbolic and the imaginary. His reformulation of Freud in terms of language has made psychoanalysis more palatable for feminists. It is no longer a biological account of women's lack or castration, but a socio-historical analysis of the transmission of meanings and values across generations.

(b) He 'decentres' dominant notions of human subjectivity unquestioningly assumed by philosophy, sociology, psychology, and linguistics. He challenges the presumption of an autonomous, ready-made subject by elaborating his view that the subject is socio-linguistically constituted. The subject is the end-result of processes that constitute it as an ego or unified self (the imaginary); and as a social and speaking subject (the symbolic). The subject is constructed by its necessary dependence on others and on the Other. This is significant for feminist theory for, on the one hand, it provides a critique of commitments to a pre-given or pre-social subject, common to both patriarchal and feminist theory; while on the other, it explains the construction of subjects as masculine/phallic or feminine/castrated, and their scope for change.

Not providing a socio-economic account of patriarchy, Lacan's work has been used to provide an account of the psychic components of social subjectivity.

(c) His account of sexuality indicates the crucial role language plays in the construction of personal identity. The (male or female) subject is produced as masculine or feminine by constituting and then prohibiting the desired (primal) object. Social needs are thus met because of the inscription of the body with meanings, encoding it with significances and values of the parents. Masculine and feminine identities are not 'natural' but products of a *rift* in the natural order, a gap into which language insinuates itself. As the key signifier of the symbolic, the phallus marks male and female bodies and sexualities in different ways. This has important implications for feminist theory: for one thing, it signals the end of universalist, or 'humanist', sexually neutral models of subjectivity. Such models can be seen as phallocentric, exerting a power of representation and authority to male models. While a number of feminists have levelled this charge at Lacan himself (Irigaray 1985b, 1985c; Gallop 1982), his work is still useful for making clear that sexuality is not incidental or contingent, but necessary for the constitution of subjectivity.

(d) His grounding of psychoanalysis within a history of thought in which Freud is a moment of radical subversion, effects a serious challenge to the presumptions and framework of received knowledges. Freud showed that the knowing subject cannot be identical to the object known. As subjects, we are not transparent to our own introspective gaze. Our ideals of a direct access to reality, a clear, solid foundation for knowledges and objectivity, are questioned by Lacan's positioning the unconscious in the context of knowledge. It has enabled a number of feminists, even those critical of Lacan, to question not only the repressions and evasions exercised by individuals but also those effected by knowledges, texts or discourses (e.g. Irigaray 1985b; Le Doeuff 1980).

(e) His emphasis on the question of language, law, and symbolic exchange as founding structures of society signals key points of investment by patriarchal culture, which feminists need to understand in order to be able to subvert. This may help explain why there is so much discussion in recent feminist literature on infantile development, the mother–child relation, the imaginary order, and their unacknowledged roles in the operation of culture.

Largely as a result of the interpretive techniques developed by Lacan and Althusser, Freud and Marx became the ambivalent sources for current feminist theory. Lacan is a difficult and controversial writer, yet his audacious style and highly critical contextualizing of Freud's work where it

can function at its most subversive, reinvigorated psychoanalysis, making it the major source for radical accounts of subjectivity.

FOUCAULT'S ANALYTICS OF POWER

Foucault's prolific works were written before and after the impact of Althusser and Lacan. He came to prominence, however, in the period after Althusser and Lacan were subjected to political criticisms. They seemed to fill a void left by the absence of self-styled intellectual masters, given his awareness of and hostility towards the kinds of Freudo-Marxist project with which both were involved.

His writings can be arbitrarily but conveniently divided into two phases, marked by the year 1970, and the publication of his inaugural address at the College de France, 'The discourse on language' (1972). His earlier works rely on what he calls an 'archaeological' method, while the later texts, following Nietzsche, are described as 'genealogical'. While I will focus mainly on his later works, it may be worth briefly describing the differences between these two methods, not only in relation to his conception of power, but also to help locate his work relative to Althusser and Lacan. This schematic comparison and contrast may also help clarify his move away from more traditional notions of power towards his own productive concept. It will become clear that while his work is indirectly relevant to feminism, his later works are more directly influenced by and influential on feminist theory, gay liberation politics and their impact on day-to-day and interpersonal politics.

The archaeological method

Even in his first archaeological text, *Madness and Civilization* ([1961] 1973) there is a marked difference between Foucault's approach and that of a more conventional historical and political analyst. This text highlights a continuing object of investigation in all his work: the concept of reason, so highly esteemed in science and philosophy, that is based on the exclusion of unreason, the passions, the body, concepts of power, etc. His archaeological texts investigate a history of unreason, silenced in its own language and the creation of unreason as the object of investigation for the newly formed 'sciences of man' out of which psychiatry, psychology, criminology, and all the modern social sciences are born. Foucault claims that the conditions for the emergence of psychiatry and psychology as sciences were based on the silencing, exclusion and containment of madness by reason:

> The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue of reason *about* madness, could be established only on the basis of such a silence.

> I have not tried to write a history of that language, but rather the archaeology of that silence.
>
> (Foucault [1961] 1973, pp. xii–xiii)

His objects of investigation are not fixed and established bodies of knowledge, but the rules of formation and the conditions of possibility of specific discourses, world-views, or *epistemes:* the discourses of psychology, psychiatry, medicine, models of representation – peripheral knowledges when compared to the natural sciences.

Madness and Civilization inaugurated a new and highly eclectic method – that of the archive, the forgotten document, the seemingly trivial document and record surrounding and traversing social practices, information considered theoretically unimportant. The information of documents, reports, judicial inquiries, files, plans that were previously seen as beneath the 'dignity' of scientific and philosophical knowledges. He also showed that there were histories waiting to be written on largely neglected areas of political concern. He showed that not only was it possible to write a history of madness, of the gaze (*The Birth of the Clinic*, [1963] 1975), of true knowledges (*The Order of Things*, [1966] 1970), of punitive practices (*Discipline and Punish*, [1975] 1979), of procedures of putting sex into discourse (*The History of Sexuality*, 1978), but also that these studies were necessary for understanding the operations of power. While trivial from the point of view of macroscopic theories of economic subordination, objects such as madness, prisons, desire, sexuality, asylums, poor houses, hospitals, institutions, which were forgotten by Marxism, were given a prominent place in analysing power in Foucault's work. Foucault himself claims that although he does not appear, in the archaeological texts, to be analysing power, in retrospect, he sees all of his work contributing to outlining the intricate and highly variable forms of power in discursive and non-discursive practices.

In schematic form, some of the main features of the archaeological method can be outlined:

(a) Archaeology differs from traditional forms of history, political theory and philosophy in its objects of investigation. Instead of dealing with the 'rigorous' science, such as physics, cosmology, mathematics – 'pure' sciences revealing a progressive movement towards 'truth' – Foucault is interested in the less certain, more conjectural 'sciences of man'. He focuses on knowledges that are still more or less in their infancy, and have direct or indirect relations to social rules and powers, 'non-formal' knowledges that are nevertheless organized according to rules of formation and evaluated by their own criteria.[11]

(b) Archaeology does not seek out lineages, continuous lines of development and progress in knowledges, but the spaces in between

interlocking domains. For example, instead of looking at the connections between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century biology, Foucault sought epistemic connections between ninteenth-century biology and its contemporary knowledges, linguistics, economics, philology. He sought lateral connection, oblique influences and relations, rather than causal or chronological connections.

(c) While more traditional researches refer to the individuality of the scientist, beliefs, practices, training, context, in seeking an explanation of the formation of knowledges – at what the knowing subject means or intends, or at influences outside the subject's awareness, archaeology avoids any explanation of science which refers to the subject. He attempts to analyse the rules of formation of knowledges, rules defining the objects, techniques and processes of validation in science – science as a complex activity. Like Althusser, he maintains that science is a process 'without a subject'.

(d) Archaeology avoids traditional explanations developed in the history and philosophy of science – such as those based on concepts of causality, development, continuity, discontinuity, and the founding subject. Foucault questions their value as explanatory tools; while they may be relevant at particular times and contexts, they are not *a priori* explanations. The rules of formation of knowledges are specific, not generalizable.

(e) Instead of relying on 'Great Texts', 'grand discoveries', or 'master thinkers' for his arguments, he turns to archives, the texts of minor officials usually neglected in political theory.

The archaeological period in his work uses and attempts to explain an underlying concept of power that was to be clearly differentiated from his later, genealogical concerns. But before turning to the genealogical texts, we will examine the differences between his project(s) and those of either Marxism or psychoanalysis, as represented by Althusser and Lacan.

Foucault, Althusser, and Lacan

In his paper 'Truth and power' (in Morris and Patton 1978), Foucault makes a number of critical objections to Marxism as theory and practice, which he augments in *The History of Sexuality* (1978). He argues that Marxism distinguishes between a unified, homogeneous economic level and a heterogeneous state and its organs, which function to represent and disseminate power relations accrued economically. He claims that Marxists have ignored the detailed operations of power by focusing largely on its global forms. As a result, major manifestations of power, such as penal or psychiatric incarceration, are either ignored or politically minimalized: 'As long as one posed the question of power while subordinating it to the

economic instance and systems of interest this ensures, one is led to regard these problems as of little importance' (Foucault, 'Truth and power', in Morris and Patton 1978, p. 34). For Foucault, power does not simply take on a massive form: even if it did, it would still require minute or micropolitical channels to disseminate it throughout the whole of the social body. Marxism's understanding of non-economic power is questioned because it is reduced to being representations of central or macropolitical power. The non-economic ultimately functions in the interests of the economic. Moreover, Foucault objects to the conception of ideology developed in Marxism, and especially in Althusser's version: ideology as a distorted representation of 'men's' real relations. While Althusser is not mentioned by name, his work seems the implicit target of Foucault's arguments. Against the Althusserian account, Foucault raises three concerns:

(a) Ideology is defined in opposition to science and truth, a form of distortion or falsehood. It is politically problematic for Althusser precisely because of its lack of truth. This enables Marxism, Foucault suggests, to consider truth and knowledge as somehow outside of power, value-free or objective, and thus to focus only on the power relations manifested in ideology. Foucault, by contrast, argues that power is even more effective when it uses truth and knowledge than when it relies on ideology or falsehood. The science/ideology distinction enables knowledge and truth to evade political scrutiny.

(b) The theory of ideology necessarily refers to a subject who is both its 'object' and its bearer. While this subject is not necessarily considered natural or pre-given, nevertheless, given the tenacity and inevitability of ideology, the category of the subject is made permanent and eternal. It is simply the details of this subject that are considered historically variable instead of its very form.

(c) The operation of ideology is secondary to an economic order. Ideology is a reflection or superstructural effect of a primary, determining level. Instead of ideology – a term he rarely, if ever, uses – Foucault looks at institutions, bodies of knowledge that are both scientific and/or practical, without one being privileged over the other by being regarded as outside of power.

Foucault opposes a commitment common to Marxism and psychoanalysis, that power exists as a form of inhibition or repression. Both rely on a negative concept of power which prevents the expression of impulses, wishes, libidinal energies, political opposition, class consciousness, and so on. Power here is a form of suppression, preventing undesired effects. For Foucault, however, repression or inhibition is, at best, a 'terminal' form of power, power in its frustrated form rather than in its typical functioning. He regards power as a productive, creative force. Power creates

knowledges, methods, and techniques, and this, for Foucault, is its major significance. To pose power in terms of the state and its repressive and ideological functions, or in terms of the Oedipus complex and the Symbolic Father's prohibitive power over the son is to pose power in terms of sovereignty or law. It is to understand power juridically, in forms that are both anachronistic and reductionist. Power is not so much a law that says no as a proliferative, productive series of forces that creates new objects, properties, subjectivities, and knowledges.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault questions three major features of psychoanalysis. First, he claims that as a self-styled 'talking cure', psychoanalysis is one of the major forms of current knowledge advocating and institutionalizing the techniques of *confession*. The analysand is encouraged to confess, to elaborate verbally all the details of his or her psychic and sexual life. Foucault regards confession as one of the major procedures of modern punitive powers by which the individual is tied to processes of normalization. He regards it as perhaps the most effective form of gaining information about the individual subjects. It is a relay between the formation of knowledges and the operation of power over the bodies and lives of individuals. Psychoanalysis has developed the ancient technique of extracting confessions into a fine art. It binds the subject's desire into a desire to speak, to tell all, as if confession could in itself be liberating. Liberation and discourse are tied together by psychoanalysis in ways which obscure the relations between confession and power.

Second, in conjunction with Deleuze and Guattari (1972), Foucault objects to the *a priori*, universal explanatory grid of Oedipal relations that psychoanalysis imposes as a general mode of explanation. This Oedipal grid does not so much explain individual psychologies as impose on them a socializing and normalizing function. In explaining individual development, sexuality, neurotic symptoms, and the kernel of the unconscious in terms of Oedipalization, psychoanalysis reduces the concrete specificities and positive actions of individuals to a form of re-enacement of an infantile drama. Like Marxism's use of macrolithic state power evidenced everywhere in the social, psychoanalysis explains psychical structures in terms of a monolithic power of refusal, the father's castrating Oedipal prohibitions. And like Marxism's indifference to the more 'marginalized' sites of power (asylums, prisons, hospitals, etc.), psychoanalysis thus ignores phenomena that are not reducible to or explicable by an Oedipal (or economic) model.

Third, as the analysis of the transference relations between analysand and analyst, psychoanalysis is unable to examine the power invested in the therapeutic and training processes. The relation between analyst and analysand, and between master and disciple is uncritically assumed.[12]

In other words, Marxism and psychoanalysis, or their offspring, Freudo-Marxism, are blind to their own investments in power. Marxists remain blind to their 'will to power', their desire to represent an ideologically

motivated, more or less ignorant mass whom they claim to represent or lead in the coming revolution (cf. Foucault, 'Powers and Strategies', in Morris and Patton 1978). While focusing on the patient's desire, psychoanalysis too is unable to investigate the analyst's desire for power and knowledge.

In spite of his wide-ranging objections to Marxism and psychoanalysis, Foucault cannot be regarded as anti-Marxist or anti-Freudian. Neither a Marxist nor a Freudian, his works can be considered 'post-Marxist' and 'post-Freudian', acknowledging their profound effects on concepts of power, and attempting to supersede them.

The genealogical method

Discipline and Punish ([1975] 1979) and *The History of Sexuality* (1978) best represent Foucault's genealogical method. These texts are foreshadowed in the transitional text between the archaeological and genealogical writings, 'The discourse on languge' (in Foucault 1972). To briefly characterize this 'new' method, we can say the following.

(a) Although Foucault claims that the archaeological texts were analyses of the relations between power and knowledge (even without his being aware of it at the time), they relied on a concept of power that was primarily negative, inhibitive or repressive:

> Now I believe that this is a wholly negative, narrow and skeletal conception of power . . . If power was anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really believe that we should manage to obey it? What gives power its hold, what makes it accepted, is quite simply the fact that it does not weigh like a force which says no, but that it runs through, it produces things, it induces pleasure, it forms knowledge, it produces discourse; it must be considered as a productive network which runs through the entire social body much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.
>
> (Foucault, in Morris and Patton 1978, p. 36)

While archaeology remains tied to a silencing, forbidding power, genealogy sees power as a productive network of forces that make connections, produce objects for knowledge, and utilize the effects of knowledges:

> The case of penalty convinced me that the problem (of power) was not so much to be seen in terms of right, law, but in terms of tactics and strategies and it was this substitution of a technical and

> strategic grid for a juridical and negative grid that I tried to set up in *Discipline and Punish*.
>
> (Foucault, 'Interview with Lucette Finas', in Morris and Patton 1978, p. 68)

(b) Along with a change in his conceptions of power also came a shift of emphasis in Foucault's objects of investigation. He became more interested in the ways in which technologies of power operate on human bodies to shape, organize, and inscribe them in particular ways. This later emphasis on bodies seems to be directed against Althusser's account of ideology as a system of inculcated ideas and beliefs. Foucault turns to the analysis of the inscription of power on bodies, without recourse to the mediation of mental or conceptual systems.

(c) Foucault concentrates more on those techniques, institutions, and practices where power is invested in his later texts than in the earlier ones. For example, his focus on disciplinary practices, procedures, and institutions in *Discipline and Punish* signals a more openly pragmatic and political concern than his earlier concentration on the coherence of a corpus of texts, truths, or statements. Not that the latter was conceived outside of power; it is just that Foucault's emphasis has significantly shifted.

(d) Genealogy is more concerned with current, local, regional, and marginal struggles than archaeology. The later works are more 'histories of the present', histories of present sites of struggle than the earlier texts. For example, one of his motivations for writing *Discipline and Punish* was his involvement in the prisoner's movement (Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons) in 1971–3. It now seems clear that *The History of Sexuality* was at least partially a response to sexual liberation movements – the women's movement and gay politics.

Foucault's conception of power

Given his critique of the investments of power and knowledge, it is hardly surprising that Foucault does not claim the status of truth or science for his own work. He considers them 'useful fictions', that is, tools or tactics of challenge. They are oppositional discourses to those which aspire to truth, authority, and power. Thus he does not present a *theory* of power, but develops a series of methods for examining the truth-effects of knowledges. Each of his books is an examination of quite specific forms of knowledge within their historical and geographic context. Instead of a theory of power, he describes his work as an 'analytics of power' – a series of methods that make no claim to lasting or eternal value (as does truth) but which may be useful at some times, and within some struggles, and is eventually disposable once strategic goals have been accomplished.

While he does not consider power a uniform and homogeneous thing and does not develop a theory of power, we can nevertheless extract several methodological theses from his work to help us examine power relations. He generally begins by spelling out what power is *not* – that is, in what ways his own view differs from other positions. He argues that:

(I) Power is not a thing, an entity, property, quality, or commodity. This proposition challenges most prevalent views of power shared by Marxism and Liberalism. Both see power as something that some individuals, groups, or classes have, and wield over others who lack it. Liberal political theorists (Hobbes, Locke, Mill) maintain that power is a social and legal right, established through social contract whereby individuals agree to give up some of their personal power for the good of society as a whole. All are able to equally participate in social organization. Marxism also sees power as a property or right that one class exercises over another in order to keep it subjugated. Many versions of feminism too regard (patriarchal) power as something men, as individuals or as a group, exercise over women; in a different social organization, power would be shared equally. Liberal, Radical, and Marxist-feminists shared the view that power is something men have and that women lack. It is often equated with physical strength, or with decision-making capacities. For Foucault, however, power is not possessed, given, seized, captured, relinquished, or exchanged. Rather, it is *exercised*. It exists only in actions. It is a complex set of ever-changing relations of force – a moveable substratum upon which the economy, mode of production, modes of governing and decision-making, forms of knowledge, etc., are conditioned:

> Power is not possessed, it acts in the very body and over the whole surface of the social field according to a system of relays, modes of connection, transmission, distribution, etc. Power acts through the smallest elements: the family, sexual relations but also: residential relations, neighbourhoods, etc. As far as we go in the social network we always find power as something that 'runs' through it, that acts, that brings about effects. It becomes effective or not, that is, power is always a definite form of momentary and constantly reproduced encounters among a definite number of individuals. Power is thus not possessed because it is 'in play'; because it risks itself.
>
> (Foucault, 'Interview with Lucette Finas', in Morris and Patton 1978, p. 60)

He refuses to equate power with a social structure (such as patriarchy), or with social institutions and practices (such as the family or the practices of socialization exercised by it), or with

interpersonal force or strength (as in heterosexual sexual and aggressive relations). Rather, power is both (a) historical systems aligned across structures, institutions, rituals, practices, and individual lives, bringing them together in some contexts, and dividing them in others – a 'substratum' of force relations; and (b) the particular use of the products of these alignments (e.g. knowledges, practices) to interrogate, regulate, supervise, observe, train, harness, and confine the behaviours and subjectivities of individuals and groups.

He does not deny feminist concepts of women as an oppressed group, nor the Marxist postulate of the oppression of the working class. He demassifies, localizes, the categories 'women' and 'the working class', so that these concepts are no longer universal categories. They are localized, made specific, placed in a socio-historical and discursive framework. Their oppression is not explained by general structures of oppression – patriarchy and/or capitalism – but in terms of a tactical utilization of the bodies and speech of women and/or the working class for the extraction of knowledges, labour, service, and so on; and a non-complete, non-hegemonic domination – a domination that, by its nature, breeds resistance, a domination never succeeding in total subjugation.

(II) Power is not centralized, global, or uniform. It is not massified into a core, such as the economy, the state, the power of elites, the Oedipal structure, the family, etc.; nor is it re-presented, filtered down through subsidiary agencies, such as state apparatuses. Power is more like a continually changing grid that runs unevenly through the whole of society, creating points of intensity as well as sites of resistance. Power has no single source (the law of the father, the accumulation of wealth), but is based on a large number of localities which are homogeneously linked, which do not necessarily serve the same function and cannot be regarded as representatives of one another (the father as head of the household exerts a different authority to that of the head of state; the former does not reflect the latter). The family, for example, cannot be regarded simply as a microcosm of state power, reflecting the interests of the macrocosm. It exerts specific powers of its own, which may or may not be allied with the various powers exercised by the state. Power does not guarantee a mode of production or reproduction, as Althusser claims. It functions through and across a mode of production, making it possible and utilizing its effects. It runs through ideologies, truths, discourses, institutions, practices without being equated with any one of them.

Foucault suggests three different orders of events invested with power relations:

(a) the orders of discourse, including the texts of 'High Theory', the notes and memos of small-time officials, diaries, court records, documents, or archives which, through their roles in establishing practices and institutions, are part of a regime of power;

(b) the orders of non-discursive practice, including systems of education, punishment, confession, etc., which, while enmeshed with discourses, are material processes concretely marking human bodies; and

(c) the *effects* of these discursive and non-discursive events; the creation of docile, observable, quantifiable, or resistant bodies, groups, populations.

At the level of discourses, power utilizes strategies for the production of truth and the disqualification of non-truth (see 'The discourse on language', in Foucault 1972); at the level of non-discursive events, power establishes technologies that direct themselves towards the bodies and behaviours of subjects; and at the level of *effects*, power establishes programmes, forms of extraction of knowledge and information that help constitute, at particular moments in time, overarching, more global systems.

(III) Because power runs *unevenly* through social formations, no event can be regarded as outside its grid. Knowledges, truths, and sciences are as much instruments and effects of power as are ideologies, propaganda or falsehood. Power is not exterior to knowledge or to social relations, but is their condition of existence. Because power can be conceptualized as an ever-changing grid with specific points of intensity, sites of greatest force, it can also be seen as a grid that necessarily *generates* points of resistance. This implies that knowledges, methods, procedures which at one time support forms of power, at another time or in a different context, can act as sites of resistance, struggle and change.

His approach questions the advisability of conceptualizing political struggle and change on the model of unified, organized mass action. Marxism, he suggests, maintains the necessity of an organized mass movement of workers in overthrowing capitalism. Many forms of feminism are also committed to an organization of the mass of women united together by a common oppression and a common struggle against patriarchy. Foucault makes it clear that even if such mass movements were possible, they may not be the most effective forms for change. Smaller groups of militants, well-positioned and strategically armed, may well be more successful in effecting change than large-scale mass organizations. These groups may align themselves over issues they share in common, but at other times, may develop hostile, or intimate, relations. In opposition to seeing two megalithic groups – women/men; workers/capitalists – Foucault

suggests a model based on guerilla warfare; a plural, multiple and multidimensional series of encounters of non-aligned groups, each struggling for self-determination.

(IV) Power cannot be conceptualized as a global phenomenon, as a macroscopic form of domination. While acknowledging a distinction between global and local forms of domination, Foucault claims that power is not imposed by the global on the local; it comes 'from below', from the (temporary) alignments of local forms of power. The local and the global mutually condition each other. No global form can gain a grip on bodies and subjects, on the behaviour of individuals and groups, without the support of local forms – the 'fine links' running through a social order. No local form of power can sustain itself for any length of time without the broader context of global, overarching alignments (Foucault 1980a, p. 94).

(V) Foucault claims that although power has intentions – i.e. aims, goals, objectives – it can never be entirely successful in achieving them. The very forms that power takes create the possibility of resistances. Power and resistance need each other. While one can never escape the grids of power, it is not necessary to always remain in a position of support to power: 'Power relationships . . . depend on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support or handle in power relations. The points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network' (Foucault 1980a, p. 95). Power is both intentional and non-subjective. It has specific aims and objects which, however, cannot be reduced to or explained by the aims and aspiration, conscious or unconscious wishes of its agents. The strategic deployment and uneven distribution of power ensure that resistance is its condition of existence.

Foucault and feminism

In the year before his death, Foucault's interests shifted again. In *The Use of Pleasure* ([1984] 1985) and *The Care of the Self* (1986) he is more concerned with the question of the ways in which subjects develop modes of (ethical) self-production and self-surveillance through the regulation of their sexualities. Once again, he claims that this interest has always been there in his works, even if not formulated in these terms. It is indeed true that he is interested in the genealogical texts with the question of the formation of (determinate types of) subjectivity through the functioning of regimes of knowledge–power. However, his concern with ethical self-regulation, the ways in which the self plans its own good health, well-being, and social position through various ethical procedures, is certainly a major shift in orientation. Yet it makes even more clear the fact that his work is

highly suggestive for feminist theory. The problem at present seems to be that few feminists analyse or criticize his work as feminists. In spite of Lacan's obscure and difficult style, and politically problematic relation to phallocentrism, much more time and attention has been devoted to his work than Foucault's. Nevertheless there are a number of issues that may, in the future if not the present, prove significant to feminism:

(a) He problematizes the aspiration to truth, as an objective, verifiable, eternal value; and his adoption of a notion of theory as strategy both confirms and supplements many feminists' suspicions about the epistemological politics invested in truth. He does not focus on the relationship between statements and their reference to a 'real' world, but on relations (of alliance or conflict) *between* statements. This has strengthened feminist interrogations of theory, especially since the 1970s. While still analysing and challenging the positions occupied by *real women* (an indispensable feminist commitment, but one that is of limited success unless undertaken with deeper investigations), feminists have also begun to question the implicit or sometimes explicit misogny of theories, disciplines, and intellectual frameworks, criticizing them and attempting to avoid their pitfalls. With his critique of the concept of truth, and his suggestion of theory as a strategy or tool, Foucault has contributed to the developing sophistication of feminist counter-researches in the sciences and humanities. It is significant, for example, that a number of French feminists do not claim a truth-status for their writings, but position them between fiction and theory; various challenges to phallocentrism do not necessarily aim to replace patriarchal falsehoods with feminist truths, but to reveal the investments patriarchal knowledges have in both representing and excluding women. They are also involved in exploring and experimenting with new kinds of speaking/writing, forms of experience, and perspectives on the world. These do not necessarily claim a universal, objective value; but may openly see themselves as particular views, written from specific perspectives (e.g. Irigaray 1977; Pateman and Gross 1986).

(b) Foucault's notion of knowledges and truths as the bearers of power has raised a number of relevant questions for those feminists involved in institutional practices (whether these are educational, welfare, social work, management, or informational). Feminist practices are neither no more nor less neutral and value-free than any other. Feminist research, for example, is as implicated in power relations as any other. Foucault implies that there are some situations in which it may be wiser to remain silent than create truth, for knowledge of these areas may be utilized against the interests of those who speak. For example, his discussion of the procedures developed for putting sex into discourse makes it clear that to speak out about sexuality, desire, one's

innermost feelings, etc., may provide data for even greater social control. In some contexts, speaking/writing may provide a key to liberation or self-determination, while in others, it may provide one's adversaries with new, more effective strategies of control.

(c) In his emphasis on the body as the ever-intensified locus of power and resistance, he signals a site that feminists have long struggled around (e.g. in campaigns associated with birth-control, abortion, body-images, and so on) but have not analysed in theoretical terms. The specificity of women's bodies and the provision of a theoretical space in which to discuss them, outside of phallocentric regimes of representation has become more urgent in feminism. Among others, Foucault suggests how the body may be viewed as an object of power and resistance, without being committed to biologistic, naturalistic or essential notions. Nevertheless, we should note in passing that Foucault himself does not specify the sexual particularity of bodies, and the implications of this for understanding regimes and technologies of power. Male and female bodies may well entail two different forms of control, modes of knowledge and forms of resistance.

(d) Foucault's account of marginal political struggles and subjugated discourses confirms the practices and systems of organization of various women's groups, which have generally refused hierarchical organization or representative leaders. Specific groups and issues enable women's groups to come together for strategic purposes. These groups do not represent others, less fortunate (as some Marxists claim), but only themselves and the positions or experiences that link them with other women. While Foucault's marginalized, localized struggles rule out the concept of 'The Revolution', smashing patriarchy in one fell swoop, he makes clear that a revolution of sorts is already under way. Patriarchal relations can be transformed, not through reformism, but in strategically located strikes at power's most vulnerable places. In this sense, his work confirms methods and ideals already developed by feminists, thus providing a theoretical justification for some or many of them.

DERRIDA AND DECONSTRUCTION

Like Foucault, Jacques Derrida has been classified as 'post-structuralist', indicating that while his intellectual roots may be based in structuralism, such as developed by Althusser and Lacan, he goes beyond them to question its assumptions, methods, and values. Also like Foucault, Derrida follows Nietzsche in the latter's denunciation of truth, objectivity, and neutrality in knowledge. He examines the intellectual commitments that knowledges – particularly philosophy – make to power relations. Unlike Foucault, Derrida's concern (shared with Lacan) is with power relations,

not between discursive and non-discursive practices, but within the order of discourse. More directly than Althusser or Lacan, Derrida takes as his object or critical investigation central texts within the history of philosophy; he concentrates on texts associated with the 'Proper Names' of philosophy – Plato, Rousseau, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Freud. These 'Proper Names' form a history of metaphysical or idealist thought that Derrida attempts actively to destabilize (Derrida 1976).

Derrida's avowed aim is not to eliminate metaphysics but to push it to its limits, forcing it to acknowledge the oppositions, exclusions, dichotomies, and distinctions which characterize it. He analyses, or rather, deconstructs, texts within the history of philosophy to show how they attain a position of dominance and what they must suppress, leave unacknowledged, for this dominance to be assured. However, extracting a general deconstructive method from his work, or even summarizing it, is very difficult. Unlike Foucault, moreover, he seems relatively reluctant to discuss his own work in interviews. Each of his papers is a close reading of other texts, an exercise in inter-textuality, a marginal reading, which requires not only a detailed knowledge of the 'primary' (metaphysical) text, but also of his particular modes of reading.

A number of French feminists follow Derrida in his claim that western metaphysics is usually structured in terms of dichotomies and binary oppositions. Within such a conceptual structure, one of the terms, the dominant one, defines the terrain of the other, placing it in a position of subordination or secondariness. This dichotomous structuring of concepts has figured strongly in our history since ancient Greece, guiding both philosophical and everyday thought: good/bad, mind/matter, being/nothingness, presence/absence, truth/error, identity/difference, signified/signifier, culture/nature, speech/writing, man/woman are only some examples. Derrida argues that these binary pairs do not define two equal and independent terms. In each pair, the first represents a positive and the second, a negative value, a deprived or lacking version of the first.

Derrida's critique consists above all in demonstrating that the positive terms – unity, identity, immediacy, presence, etc. – are in fact intimately dependent on, and can themselves be defined by, their opposition to the 'negative' terms – difference, distance, deferment, and dissimulation. Presence, for example, is inevitably bound up with, but unable to accept its dependence on, absence. Rather than seeing absence as the deprivation of presence, Derrida shows that absence *can* be seen as the primary term and presence as its negative counterpart.

He claims that western metaphysics is dominated by the belief in our ideal of the self-presence and the immediacy of concepts like truth, reality, knowledge, identity: the ideal of a truth that presents itself directly to consciousness in 'pure' form, without the mediation of anything extraneous haunts western knowledges. This (impossible) ideal provides one of the

criteria by which western reason judges discourses, ignoring some at the same time as elevating others to the status of knowledge. Derrida gives the name 'logocentrism' to this obsession with presence (*logos* = speech, logic, reason, the word, God). His work consists in various deconstructive readings of logocentric texts, those which presume that the word, the text, language, are self-evident, clearly delimited, independent, neutral media for the transmission of pre-given or pure concepts.

Philosophy has an investment in seeing itself as a discipline unaffected by language, independent of its own textuality and materiality, unhampered in its exploration of ideas by the limits and nature of the linguistic tools upon which it relies. Philosophy refuses its dependence on the 'frailties', imprecisions, fluctuations, and changes that occur within languages. It will not acknowledge that it is a concrete, material process involved in and surrounded by other practices which influence it and will not acknowledge that it is a site for more or less vicious struggles for power.

Especially in its typical Anglo-Saxon forms, philosophy designates language usage as 'style', which is then considered as an effect of individual idiosyncrasies, an ornamental embellishment that can easily be replaced by a neutral, technical, accurate (non-'stylish') mode of expression. For philosophy, any truth must be seen as independent of the particular way it is formulated, translatable into other terms without a loss of meaning.

In opposition to logocentrism, but ironically spawned by it, Derrida develops a series of deconstructive techniques which seek out the traces and marks of textuality and materiality that are crucial if unacknowledged elements of the various texts he explores. These elements are key phrases, metaphors, and images necessary for the text to function. But they fall outside of the logic of the text's avowed aims; they exert a textual resistance to logocentric assumptions implicit in the text. These figures of speech, turns of phrase, etc., indicate points of possible paradoxes in the logocentric order. Terms such as 'differance', 'supplement', 'trace', 'pharmakon', 'hymen', 'dissemination', and even 'woman' (Derrida 1979; 1981a, pp. 173–286) challenge the primacy of presence and are used as pivotal points to question the logocentric texts within which they were embedded.

'Grammatology', 'the science of writing', 'dissemination', 'the science of difference', 'textuality' are all terms that signal an excessiveness or supplement that escapes the logic of the self-present subject, the presumed master of meaning. Difference eludes the grasp of the subject and indicates not the impossibility of meaning but its endless deferral and displacement (Spivak 1976; Cousins 1978; Derrida 1981b).

Difference/differance

The concept of difference has been extremely powerful in French feminist theory. Many so-called 'feminists of difference', who struggle for recognition and validation of feminine autonomy and specificity rely on the notion of difference – 'pure difference', difference without positive terms (Saussure) – to undermine the phallocentric definition of woman as the binary opposite of man. On the other hand, there are a number of attacks from feminist quarters over his use of the term 'woman' as a metaphor for style (Jardine 1980, 1985; Bartowski 1980; Spivak 1983).

In his earlier work, Derrida attempts to deconstruct the texts of phenomenology (especially those of Husserl and Heidegger) to make clear the reliance of metaphysics upon the logic of presence. Phenomenology needs concepts such as presence, consciousness, immediacy, the privilege of speech over writing (phonocentrism), signified over signifier. It is a philosophy of sameness, of presence, of a given subjectivity. Derrida attempts to reveal the dependence of the text on displacement, mediation, unconsciousness. He shows that phenomenology depends on repressed terms, oppositions and hierarchies it can't acknowledge. Similarly, while remaining close to Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis, Derrida also attempts to deconstruct their logocentric commitments (Derrida 1978a, pp. 196–231; 1978b, pp. 19–22). Psychoanalysis may well effect a deep and far-reaching subversion of the metaphysics of presence, subjectivity, and truth; it is nevertheless still part of a logocentric tradition. Structuralism and semiotics are also seen as moments of rupture or subversion which, almost in spite of themselves, remain committed to binary pairs (signifier/signified, langue/parole, structure/event, etc.). Saussure, for example, carefully distinguishes signifier from signified, claiming that neither term has an identity except in terms of its opposite. While rupturing logocentrism, he also privileges the signified or concept, explaining the signifier in terms of it.

If we take sameness/difference, presence/absence, speech/writing as typical examples, Derrida shows that the privileged term derives its position from a suppression or curtailment of its opposite or other. He argues that these oppositions and the distribution of values they effect, is not *given* but is an effect of an uncontrolled play of terms. Sameness and difference are both dependent on difference. But this difference is not the same difference as that which exists in the binary structure. To designate this difference within difference Derrida coins the neologism, 'differ*a*nce' with an 'a'. This term signals the primacy of the repressed term over the dominant term. For example, it signals the primacy of writing over speech (the 'a' only has value in reference to the absent 'e' it presumes and plays with), of matter over mind (it is a series of material traces, textual marks, of which the signified or concepts are the effect). The play of difference is

the unspoken condition of logocentrism. It functions as an equivocal term, irresolvably duplicit:

> On the one hand, it indicates difference as distinction, inequality or discernibility; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of *spacing* and temporalizing . . . (T)here must be a common, although entirely different root within the sphere that relates the two movements of differing to one another. We provisionally gave the name *differance* to this sameness which is not *identical*.
>
> (Derrida 1973, p. 129)

Derrida uses the term 'differance' to designate:

1 An active and passive movement that consists in deferring, delaying and substituting. This delay is not the delay of a given presence (whether of the subject, meaning or truth); it is *originary*. Lack or absence marks the origin itself, not simply the things substituted for the (lost) object.
2 A movement at the basis of different things. In this sense, differance is the condition of difference, and of the binary oppositional structure itself. Differance is thus the condition for *both* difference *and* sameness.
3 A differance that is the condition of linguistic difference, and thus, of signification. This differance consists in the recalcitrance of a text in terms of its author's intentions – the fact that the author (or reader) cannot control the totality of the text he or she produces, and thus over the meaning intended.
4 The activity designed to reveal difference, a 'provisional' name (like 'grammatology') for analysing the unfolding of discourses. The concept of differance, the movement of difference, the challenge to binary logic that these pose are gathered together under this one term.

Deconstruction

Deconstruction is always a double procedure, a 'double science' or double writing, one that simultaneously occupies a space both inside and outside of texts. It is a double procedure, a duplicit use of a system's own weapons against themselves.

Its double processes consist in a reversal of dichotomous terms *and* a displacement of the system within which they function. If one simply reverses philosophical/political dichotomies, placing the subordinate term – absence, writing, difference, woman – into the dominant position previously occupied by presence, speech, identity, man, a (reverse) logocentrism still operates. Moreover, the force and violence that gave the dominant term its primacy is in effect ignored. Reversal must counter this force. If, on the other hand, one merely displaces dichotomies, one cannot understand their historically necessary structuring role within the history of

knowledges. One must both reverse the dichotomy and displace the excluded, negative term, moving it from its oppositional role into the very heart of the dominant term. This move makes clear the violence of the hierarchy, and its unspoken debt to the subordinated term. It also makes clear the non-reversible, unequal roles given to the two terms. The simultaneous reversal and displacement makes it clear that the dichotomous structure *could* be replaced by other modes of conceptualization. Although they are historically necessary, they are not logically necessary.

Deconstruction thus involves not two, but three 'phases': reversal, displacement, and the creation of a new term – which Derrida calls a 'hinge word' – such as 'trace' (simultaneously present and absent), 'supplement' (simultaneously plenitude and excess); 'differance' (sameness and difference); 'pharmakon' (simultaneously poison and cure); 'hymen' (simultaneously virgin and bride, rupture and totality), etc. These are terms which are both *preconditions* of the oppositional structure and terms *in excess* of its logic (Derrida 1981b, pp. 41–42).

These 'hinge words' (in Irigaray, the two lips, fluidity, maternal desire, a genealogy of women,[13] in Kristeva, semanalysis, the semiotic, polyphony, etc.[14]) function as undecidable, vacillating between both oppositional terms, occupying the ground of their 'excluded middle'. If strategically harnessed, these terms rupture the systems from which they 'originate' and in which they function. Derrida's deconstructive 'double science' aims to undo the history of logocentrism in order to allow differance its space of free play.

This is both an *impossible* but *necessary* project: impossible because, on the one hand, it can only use logocentrism to challenge logocentrism (witness the parallel with feminism, which must use patriarchal terms to challenge patriarchy); and on the other hand, deconstruction reveals only what is absent, no-thing, non-sense, a difference, gap, or trace. A deconstructive reading does not so much demonstrate the errors, flaws, and contradictions in texts, but tries to reveal the *necessity* with which what a text says is bound up with what it cannot say.

Difference: sexuality and textuality

While Derrida's work has been extremely influential for some French and, more recently, Anglo-Saxon feminists – especially because of his development of deconstructive reading strategies and the concept of difference, it has also aroused considerable controversy within feminist circles, especially for his use of the term 'woman' and 'becoming woman' as metaphors for the demise of truth, and the play of difference. While a number of feminists have defended Derrida,[15] others have accused him of co-opting, de- or re-politicizing women's struggles for self-determination in ways he may not be prepared to accept.

While the metaphor of 'woman' as style circulates in a number of Derrida's texts, his position is most detailed in his readings of Nietzsche in *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* (1979). Here, through a reading of Nietzsche's pronouncements on woman, Derrida signals Nietzsche's radical break with phallocentric traditions of speculation on 'the woman question', as well as Nietzsche's commitment to and involvement in the history of misogynist thought.

His paper 'La double séance', translated as 'The double session' (1981a, pp. 173–286), is his first detailed discussion of the use of the metaphor of femininity. The term 'hymen' functions as one of his hinge words, undecidable within binary logic, baffling the either/or choice demanded by logocentrism. The hymen is neither identity nor difference, neither confusion nor distinction, neither inside nor outside, neither the veil nor the unveiling, neither consummation nor virginity, but the condition of both. It is the metaphor Derrida uses for a certain folded space of writing, the virginal/consumed space of the white page on which the pen/phallus disseminate (his pun on *seme*, the minimal unit of meaning, and semen). A dissemination that is a seed sown in futility, a non-reproduction, an insemination that does not produce within a genealogy of patronyms. The patronym is patriarchy's stamp upon the subject, the Proper Name (of the father) (*propre* = clean, own, proper, property, propriety) paying homage to his authority. Neither directed from a past (the origin in the father's genealogy), nor to a future (a teleology of reproduction, through dutiful sons, of the father's law), dissemination is fruitlessly expended:

> The fold folds (itself): its meaning spaces itself out with a double mark, in the hollow of which a blank is folded. The fold is simultaneously virginity, what violates virginity and the fold which, being neither one nor the other and both at once, undecidable, *remains* as a text, irreducible to either of its two senses. . . . The masculine is turned back upon the feminine: the whole adventure of sexual difference.
>
> But in the same blow, so to speak, the fold ruptures the virginity it marks as virginity. . . . It differs from itself, even *before* the letter opener can separate the lips of the book. It is divided from and by itself, like the hymen. After the consummation more folded up than ever, the virginity transforms the act that has been perpetrated into a simulation, a 'barbarous simulacrum'.
>
> (Derrida 1981a, pp. 258–9)

Paradoxically duplicit, the hymen is the space of imitation, mimesis, or artifice, a space of mime (Derrida's paper, 'The double session' is a reading of Mallarmé's *Mimique*) that is traditionally attributed to women.

Derrida's 'homage' to femininity, in many respects similar to Lacan's in

its chivalrous rivalry, attributes the possibility of dissimulating dissimulation (not dissemination) to femininity: femininity is the possibility of feigning the truth. In being imitated – imitation is not here, as it was for Plato, a form of debasement or impurity – truth is supplementary, making up for an originary absence: 'Woman is but one name for that untruth of truth' (Derrida 1979, p. 51). His 'homage' is a reading of Nietzsche's proposition from *The Gay Science:* 'Finally – if one loved them . . . what comes of it inevitably? that they 'give themselves', even when they – give themselves. The female is so artistic' (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 317). Women mime or impersonate orgasm even at the moment of orgasm – the implication being that this contrasts with men's clear-cut orgasm, a 'real' one which cannot be faked.

Derrida's reading involves the triple process of deconstruction. Nietzsche's proposition of woman-as-truth, woman and truth, can be resolved in three broad phases: in the first, woman is seen as a liar, the figure of faslehood and misrepresentation, in opposition to the 'credulous man, who, in support of his testimony, offers truth and his phallus as his own proper credentials' (Derrida 1979, p. 97). In the second phase, woman is truth, but a truth which is not to be trusted, a dissimulating truth. As truth, woman does not believe in the truth. She is guileful, play-acting, which is her truth. But, as Derrida points out: '[T]he woman, up to this point, then, is twice castration: once as truth and once as untruth' (Derrida 1979, p. 97). The woman proposed is castrated – defined only by reaction to or as the negation of a purity measured by man. In the third phase, however, Nietzsche, deconstructs his own position:

> beyond the double negation of the first two (propositions), woman is recognised and affirmed as an affirmative power, a dissimulatress, an artist, a dionysiac. And no longer is it man who affirms her. She affirms herself, in and of herself, in man. Castration, here again, does not take place. And anti-feminism, which condemned woman only so long as she answered to man from the two reactive positions, is in its turn overthrown.
>
> (Derrida 1979, p. 97)

Woman ultimately affirms the untruth of truth, the impossibility of identity, the unsubstantiated faith in truth, being and presence. She is neither the veil over truth, nor truth as an unveiling of nothing-to-see (Freud's description of female genitals); but the truthfulness of truth, the unveiling which veils another veil: 'The hymen is therefore not the truth of unveiling. There is not *aletheia* [truth as unveiling], only a blink of the hymen' (Derrida 1981a, p. 293). Woman is the metaphor of truth's dissimulation – and with it the demise of a (logocentric) philosophical pretension to provide 'answers':

> There is no such thing as the essence of woman because woman averts, she is averted of herself. Out of the depths, endless and unfathomable, she engulfs and distorts all vestige of essentiality, of identity, of property. And the philosophical discourse, blinded, founders on these shoals and is hurled down these depthless depths to its ruin. There is no such thing as the truth of woman, but it is because of the abyssal divergence of the truth, because that untruth is 'truth'.
>
> (Derrida 1979, p. 51)

The invaginated, hymeneal text is the space of the dissemination of meaning and truth, woman as the impossible, deceiving, seductive, unveiling of a truth that does not exist, woman as paradox and enigma. Such is Derrida's use of metaphors of femininity. As metaphor, *Woman* has the potential to dislodge the operation of a tyrannical dichotomous structure; but as *name* (and not even a 'proper' name at that!), woman is the term referring to women. This play with the name/metaphor may well shake the foundations of a logocentric and phallocentric intellectual tradition; but it will also exact its price – from women.

Derrida and feminism

Derrida's destabilization of logocentrism and binary logic challenged many of the same targets to which feminists have directed their energies. I will simply outline some of the ways in which Derrida's work has been utilized in feminist research.

(a) Phallocentric theory has relied on various dichotomous characterizations of man and woman. One of the problems faced by feminists has been how to question these structures. At first, it appeared that the most useful strategy would be a reversal of the positions of the binary terms. But, as has been recognized, this strategy remains within binary logic. Derrida's deconstructive techniques make it clear that if feminist theory is to succeed in its challenge to phallocentric discourses, it cannot do so from a position outside of phallocentrism. Deconstruction is an attempt to negotiate with this dilemma: to remain outside a (logocentric, phallocentric) system is to leave it intact; to remain only within its terms, on the other hand, is to risk absorption, to be unable to go beyond it. Working from within logocentrism, deconstruction is a method for dealing, within texts, with the text's limits; it is to play with the positions inside and outside of that text:

> The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aims except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*, because one always inhabits and all the more

> when one does not suspect it. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally . . . the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work.
>
> (Derrida 1976, p. 24)

His deconstructive project parallels and refines the feminist challenge to phallocentrism (phallocentrism is a sub-category of logocentrism, where the phallus takes on the role of the logos). Logocentrism is implicitly patriarchal; the very structure of binary oppositions is privileged by the male/non-male (i.e. female) distinction. Given the co-operation of these 'centrisms', deconstruction and the play of difference it engenders may be of strategic value to feminists.

(b) His stress on the material processes of reading (and writing) and the violent, coercive force necessary for terms to function as they have, provides a politically, as well as intellectually, useful trajectory for feminist researches. Not only does he make explicit the powers invested in discourses (whether these are knowledges, sciences, truths, or not), indicating further objects of feminist interrogations, but also the active, political role of reading and interpretation. This confirms and adds depth to feminist projects, especially in literature or in reading/writing differently. 'Deconstruction' is a much-used term in various critical theories. However, Derrida's term involves very precise reading practices that problematize the very grounds on which various discourses base themselves.

(c) Deconstructive techniques inform the work of Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, among others. Derrida's mode of deconstruction, which instead of creating a new truth aims to unveil the political commitments of various prevailing discourses, has provided one of Irigaray's major interpretive techniques in her critical/lyrical evaluations of texts within psychoanalysis and the history of philosophy (1984; 1985b; 1985c). His more substantive arguments about a difference inhabiting all identity have inspired Kristeva's analysis of the symbolic and the semiotic, whose interrelation can be understood on the model of a difference *within* (personal and sexual) identity.

(d) His commitment to the concept of difference has become emblematic of a powerful critical force within feminist theory. Clearly Derrida is not the first or the only theorist of difference. (See for example, the prefigurative writings of Blanchot, Bataille, and Levinas, who wrote decades before Derrida.) Yet, with the exception of feminists themselves, his work is probably the most politically motivated. He adds a political dimension to Saussure's concept of pure difference to make it more incisive in challenging metaphysical adherences to

identity. In distinguishing difference from 'differance', he shows that difference need not function within the logic of identity as its excluded element. On the contrary, it implies a mode of autonomy, not independent of and in isolation from other elements, but functioning with reference to them.

(e) His analysis of the metaphor of woman and femininity, whatever its problems, still makes explicit a procedure common within phallocentric texts – their necessary dependence on an either implicit or explicit metaphor of femininity as excess, materiality or instability. He makes clear how these metaphors have been necessary for phallogocentric texts to continue their dominance. In spite of Derrida's relevance to feminist theoretical projects, even those sympathetic to his work have expressed alarm at his use of femininity as a deconstructive tool.[16] Irigaray, for example is scathing about his metaphor of 'becoming woman' which, he claims, makes sense only if one is *not* a woman. Moreover, taking on the metaphor of woman as revolutionary upheaval is an act of political appropriation. It is significant that at precisely the moment when women begin to speak of themselves as subjects, as women, men begin to moralize about the politics of 'becoming feminine':

> As for men, it is up to them to speak for themselves. I have no desire to speak for them as they have spoken for us, nor to speak 'universal'. . . . They ask themselves certain types of questions which, as such, must not be confused with women's questions because many men at the moment say: 'Now we are becoming women . . .'. As soon as something worthwhile manifests itself concerning women, men want to become women. What interests me is the difference. Why, all of a sudden, should one be in a reversal of power, in a problematic of the Same? Above all, don't become women, sirs!
>
> (Irigaray 1981, trans. C. Sheaffer-Jones and E. Gross)

In acknowledging deconstruction as a strategic tool or device for feminist readings, Gayatri Spivak suggests an ambivalent attitude may be most appropriate:

> My attitude to deconstruction can now be summarized: first, deconstruction is illuminating as a critique of phallocentrism; second, it is convincing as an argument against the founding of a hystero-centric order to counter phallocentric discourse; third, as a 'feminist' practice itself, it is caught on the other side of sexual difference.
>
> (Spivak 1983, p. 184)

She remains wary of Derrida's metaphorics of femininity, which hovers dangerously close to other variants of male (self-) representations which use woman as a reflective mirror:

> If women have always been used as the instrument of male self-deconstruction, is this philosophy's newest twist? . . . a bold description of the feminist's problem of discourse after the critique of the old ways of knowing. . . . Yet, with respect, we cannot share in the mysterious pathos of the longing: for a reason as simple as the question of woman in general, asked in this way, is *their* question, not *ours*.
>
> (Spivak 1983, pp. 183–4)

Feminists today refuse the passive positions of metaphor and speculative object of art and theory for men. Instead of being metaphor, women affirm the right to *make* metaphor, to become the subjects of discourse instead of its objects. It is by no means clear whether Derrida, and for that matter Althusser, Lacan, or Foucault, provide this space for women's self-representations, even if their works can be strategically used by feminists in attempting to counteract, decentre, or deconstruct patriarchal theory.

FEMINISM, MASCULINITY AND POWER

Without detailing criticisms of the foregoing texts, I think it is important to recognize what feminist theory has learned from the male theorists, and in what ways it must depart from them. Each of the theorists discussed develops a complex theoretical system(s) or method(s) in his work, and each defines his own work both in relation to and in disagreement with each other. Each adopts a theoretical and political position that is, in part at least, a response to political activities, movements of resistance and rebellion, including feminism. We need to look at what their positions are on the question of sexual difference, as well as what relations feminism sees between their discourses and feminist aims and goals. Given the limits of space here, I will not discuss those criticisms and objections to their works developed outside feminist perspectives. I will concentrate only on the relevant relations each has to feminism.

Before briefly outlining the complex, reciprocal interactions between feminism and radical theory, it is worth pointing out that, while they are often acknowledged as sources of inspiration in feminist texts, it is rare to find feminist sources acknowledged there. At best, women are eulogized or treated as metaphors; at worst they are ignored or actively silenced under the general category, 'man' or 'humanity'. For example, where Lacan and Derrida mention feminism, it is in a caricatured form:

> Feminism is nothing but the operation of a woman who aspires to be like a man. And in order to resemble the masculine dogmatic philospher this woman lays claim – just as much claim as he – to truth, science and objectivity in all their castrated delusions of virility.

> Feminism too seeks to castrate. It wants a castrated woman. Gone the style.
>
> (Derrida 1979, p. 65)

Which feminism is Derrida referring to? But he is at least prepared to raise feminist issues, as Foucault and Althusser do not.

Each has a certain blindness to the specificity of female subjectivity, the interests of feminist theory and politics, and the concrete particularities of the (culturally inscribed) female body. Althusser, for example, does not neglect to mention that the crucial ISA in the construction of subjectivity is the nuclear family. Yet, he does not make the point that it is not the nuclear family *per se* that socializes subjects. It is significant that the father generally plays only an indirect role in socialization, which proceeds even in his absence or death. Althusser neglects the formative role of the *mother* in the various processes producing subjects, and the fact that it is only the father's *authority*, not his presence, that is required. The mother bears the child, nurtures, educates, loves, and cleans it; and ensures that the child adequately reproduces socially acceptable behaviour. The nuclear family could not function as such except through its unrecognized debt to the mother's services. Althusser is blind to the fact that if there are 'capitalist ideologies', then these have always functioned in pre-capitalist cultures as and through patriarchal systems. The ways in which capitalism and its agencies function is not randomly or accidentally male dominated; such domination is one of its integral features.

Althusser tries to absolve himself of responsibility for neglecting the psychical and sexual components of bourgeois ideologies by claiming that psychoanalysis explains this dimension of social existence. Coupled with psychoanalysis, Marxism, it seems, need not pay any serious attention to the sexual division of labour, or various economic forms of women's oppression, for psychoanalysis serves this purpose! Clearly the ideologies which function to interpellate individuals as subjects within culture do so in sexually bifurcated, sexually distinguished ways – the subjects produced are not sexually neutral, but have masculine or feminine attributes. Whatever other objections may be levelled against his understanding of ideology, he not only ignores the sexually specific effects of ideologies; he leaves no theoretical space in his account for patriarchal power relations, and their effects on and interactions with capitalist power relations.

If Althusser is blind or indifferent to the effects of sexual relations on ideology, and ideology's relation to the structuring of sexual distinctions as relations of domination and subordination, his work has nevertheless provided a series of useful questions and critiques that feminists may be able to utilize in projects quite different from his own. His anti-humanist critique of notions of the pre-given subject, his claims that cultures, institutions, and practices materially produce subjects, his conception of

ideology as a web of interrelated ideas, practices, values, behaviours, and social institutions and structures, his mode of relating socio-economic issues to epistemological and cultural questions, have all proved fruitful and suggestive for many contemporary feminists (see Barrett, Spivak, Mitchell, and Rose). Yet, in terms of the critiques of his work developed by feminists and non-feminists (e.g. Hirst), ideology considered as a distorted reflection of reality, in opposition to truth or science, remains a problematic framework in which to develop feminist theory.

With analogous blindness, Lacan fails to specify that the phallus, the threshold signifier of the symbolic, is not merely a signifier, an empty trace, but is 'filled' or given meaning with reference to the penis. Women cannot be regarded as *lacking the phallus* (and thus attempting to be it) unless this is the sign of the presence or absence of the penis. Lacan claims to have radically separated biology (the penis) from psychic and symbolic orders (the phallus); yet he also continually collapses them together whenever the question of femininity, female sexuality or women's identities arises (see 'A love letter', in Mitchell and Rose 1982). He seems to want it both ways: women are 'produced as castrated' only through phallic inscription; yet, there is something of/in the woman that predisposes her to the side of 'not-all', the negative, or supplementary side ('A love letter', in Mitchell and Rose 1982). In other words, Lacan is unable to explain why it is the *phallus* and not any other signifier that operates as the 'signifier of signifiers' to the symbolic or social order, why the law must be the father's, why masculinity provides the norms of femininity, and why female sexual pleasure is considered either as phallic or as supplementary to the phallus.

It is not simply that Lacan ignores feminist questions about the differential values of the two sexes, but also that he renders the structures and power relations between the sexes eternal and universal, conditions of the very existence of language and sociality. Lacan is, as usual, very difficult to pin down. But some of his followers are a little more explicit. One of the most 'authorized' of his 'disciples', Moustafa Safouan, openly discusses the question of the universality of the Oedipus complex (Safouan 1981, p. 87):

> We know what a storm has been unleashed by Freud's thesis as to the phallicism of the girl. But in the end, over and above anything that might be said about one person's feminism and another's misogny, we are dealing with an indubitable analytic fact, even if it is not easy to make it intelligible because after all, the penis is not such a wonderful thing as to force the girl to want to sacrifice her own nature.
>
> [Castration] . . . lays the foundations for the object relation in the human being, insofar as it imposes not mourning for the primordial object, which is rather a matter of the law, but a *restriction on the*

narcissism into which the relation to the object as such would otherwise set.

In other words, it is not so much the Oedipus complex as the castration threat he claims is universal. This is because the child must find a way of detaching itself from the mutually defining relation to the mother, which it can only do with respect to a third party who *has* an access to the mother that the child (of either sex) *lacks*. The child's genital desires must be subordinated, that is, not to another, a successful rival, but to a law which directs its desire to substitutes. Yet neither Safouan nor Lacan can explain why the *phallus* takes on this role, why the mother must be construed as lacking, and why children must abandon the primordial love relation according to the *presence* or *absence* of anatomical organs and the threat or 'reality' of their loss. Nor indeed, why it is the woman who functions as the nurturer, the imaginary other from whom the child must detach itself. We must ponder whether, if fathers or men nurtured and reared children from their earliest years, the child would be detached from him by the postulate of the *father's* anatomical lack. Or whether the mother would consequently be regarded as 'possessing' what he lacks. It seems doubtful, given the fact that many fathers, especially lone fathers, do act as nurturers. I am suggesting that Lacan, Safouan, and indeed Freud, take what are the prevailing norms of our culture and ontologize them to enable them to function universally. This then provides a perfect justification for the necessary maintenance of patriarchal values of the two sexes in their present, oppressive forms. As universal conditions of culture itself (both Lacan and Safouan refer to Lévi-Strauss here), women's castration and the phallic attributes of masculinity become unquestionable.

If, however, psychoanalysis is a powerful source of inspiration to many feminists, in most cases this is not because these problems are unrecognized. On the contrary, many feminists have turned to psychoanalytic texts precisely because they articulate in explicit fashion the ideals and values underlying all cultural and theoretical practice within patriarchy. Psychoanalysis remains useful to feminism because, to date, it is the most sophisticated and intricate account of psychological processes and structures functioning in our culture for the reproduction of male and female social and sexual positions. Concepts like the unconscious, desire, drive, identification, etc., seem necessary for explaining the transmission of sexual roles, and, moreover, for attempting to challenge or subvert their transmission and reproduction.

In spite of its problems Lacan's work has been effective in focusing attention on the powerful subjective effects of language and systems of signification in producing the socio-symbolic subject. Through his theory and writings, Lacan demonstrated the tenacity, power, and playfulness of language, and its primacy over experience. He has revealed an unconscious

dynamic of articulation that has inspired new modes of listening/reading/reception of texts, in which what is not spoken is as significant as what is said. Ironically, while it was Althusser who attempted to develop a materialist theory of subjectivity that integrated psychic and socio-economic orders by means of the concept of ideology, it was in fact Lacan who, through his materialist understanding of language, was more successful in linking the individual to the social. This is an insight that feminists cannot afford to ignore.

Lacan's subversion of philosophical categories – the subject, truth, reality, certainty, knowledge – is a powerful tool against phallocentric traditions governing all the academic disciplines. His insights about the ways in which the strange 'texts' of the unconscious may be deciphered, his linguistic explanation of the unconscious, are all trajectories which feminists could develop one way or another for their own purposes without necessarily remaining committed to more problematic features of psychoanalysis. Above all, Lacan's work has been most fruitfully interpreted (by, for example, Irigaray and Gallop) as providing a detailed analysis of the operations of masculine desire, men's socio-symbolic construction and positioning, the constitution of masculine, phallic sexuality and the ways in which men's fantasies of and desires for women are projected on to women. But what it leaves untouched is the specificity of women's positions. If Lacan elaborates collective masculine fantasies about women that are actively imposed on to women, he does not provide any account of the ways in which women do or do not live up to these expectations.

While clearly more sensitive to issues raised by feminist theory and politics than Lacan or Althusser, Foucault also seems to be unaware of the impact that recognizing sexual difference would have on his work. Although he carefully disclaims any speaking *on behalf of* or in the name of others, such as women (in 'The political function of the intellectual', 1977), he neglects the fact that the various technologies of power he outlines operate in quite different ways acording to the sex of the bodies they take as their objects. Power inscribes male and female bodies in quite different ways, with different goals and consequences. The body is not a sexually neutral or indifferent, pliable, flesh; it is a body that is sexually concrete (even if it does not, as with *Herculine Barbin* (1980b), conform to a binary classificatory schema).

Technologies and instruments of power are not neutral with respect to sexual difference. While it may be true that these technologies actively contribute to the production of the body as male or female – i.e. explain the modes of *categorization* of bodies – Foucault does not explain the fact that different technologies and instruments inscribe male and female bodies. The material practices surrounding them in familial and residential relations, the different institutions – educational, legal, medical, and

religious – and the different tasks male and female bodies are expected to perform, are all neglected by Foucault.

While his work may prove useful to feminists in signalling the centrality to and production of bodies by power and in pointing out the modes of material inscription cultures must use in producing and regulating its members, he remains ignorant of the sexual specificity of processes he considers universal to a culture. While he demassifies the megalithic notion of patriarchy as a system of totalizing completion, he does not thereby explain the tangible effects of patriarchal domination on the bodies and lives of the two sexes. Given the concepts he employs, he has no way of explaining these differences.

Until *The History of Sexuality* (1978) the question of sexuality was barely raised by him. In this text, in which the question of the two sexes seemed difficult to avoid, Foucault devotes only one small section to women's specificity when he discusses the hystericization of women's bodies. In *The Use of Pleasure* ([1984] 1985), the second volume of an incomplete history of sexuality, he openly acknowledges that the modes of ethical self-regulation are relevant only to men:

> women were generally subjected . . . to extremely strict constraints, and yet this ethics (of self-regulation) was not addressed to women; it was not their duties, or obligations, that were recalled, justified, or spelled out. It was an ethics for men: an ethics thought, written, and taught by men – to free men, obviously. A male ethics, consequently, in which women figured only as objects or, at most, as partners that one had to train, educate and watch over when one had them under one's power, but stay away from when they were under the power of someone else (father, husband, tutor) . . . it was an elaboration of masculine conduct carried out from the viewpoint of men in order to give form to *their* behaviour.
>
> (Foucault [1984] 1985, pp. 22–3)

Even if it is not for women, such an ethics is still not irrelevant to them. Women are still affected by men's sexual ethics, even when it is directed to a paederastic object. It is not clear whether women have a (different) sexual ethic, a question he doesn't raise. One wonders whether his studies on power and knowledge are simply descriptions of techniques regulating, punishing, supervising, and knowing *men's* bodies, not women's.

In Derrida's case, his focus on the power or force vested in concepts and discourses has inspired feminists to challenge the most basic philosophical or theoretical assumptions of universal or neutral validity by virtue of their self-evidence. Yet, like his colleagues, Derrida too occupies a position in phallocentric discourses. While advocating the subversiveness of the metaphor of femininity, he neglects the effects of his own enunciative position as masculine. He himself acknowledges that not only is *what* a

discourse says, important, but also *how* it is said, the specific terms in which it is articulated. We must also add to this the *position* from which it is said – who speaks and from what position. In speaking for or as women, he takes away the space which women have (re-) defined for themselves. He uses women as metaphors of a subversion of truth and order, while not recognizing women as subjects and the positions from which *they* might speak.

Each of these male theorists of power draws attention to notions of power and human subjectivity. Yet each ignores the masculinity or phallocentrism of his textual point of view. In different ways, each ignores the question of sexual difference, specificity, and autonomy by claiming some kind of sexual generality or universality, for their leading terms are presented as if sexuality is an irrelevant issue. Yet all theory, all knowledge is produced from sexually specific positions and with sexually specific effect. In so far as these are relevant to men's work as much as women's, what is needed is not just the *inclusion* of women within their various investigations, but also the acknowledgement that their works are also the effects of specifically masculine points of view and interests.

Male theorists should, in other words, speak *as men*, speak while acknowledging their positions as masculine subjects. *The more 'woman' exists as metaphor in men's texts, the less energy and subversive power do women have to speak in their own names.*

CONCLUSION

Each of these male theorists has problems in coming to terms with the status and scope of his discourses. While all (perhaps with the exception of Lacan) claim to be open to questions of historical, geographical, and cultural diversity, they do not seem to be able to question their own works in terms of *sexual* specificity. This does not mean that their works are useless or irrelevant to feminist theory. They retain a relevance partly because they are implicated in patriarchy as much as any texts are. They provide *objects* of feminist investigation and procedures and methods or strategies feminists may harness in their projects. Clearly, feminist theory is itself implicated in patriarchal paradigms. These theories of power and subjectivity, instead of providing overarching frameworks or criteria for judging feminist theory, can instead become the objects of feminist scrutiny. Feminists need to maintain something of a theoretical distance from their frameworks and commitments in order to be able to use what is of value while rejecting the more problematic structure of each. This will be difficult, given the demanding, difficult texts that each has produced.

These male theorists do not simply provide routine objects for feminist analysis. Their works have been particularly instrumental in developing and adding sophistication to feminist theory over the last two decades.

They have provided a number of crucial insights that, it could be argued, helped shape the form and range of feminist theories circulating today. Feminist theory has come to maturity, however, when it can both acknowledge these sources and also go beyond them in producing its own perspectives. This will involve a three-pronged approach to phallocentric texts: first, a critical immersion in (male) theory is necessary, to the extent of understanding its commitments, contributions, and vulnerable points; then, an anti-sexist critique of the kind that I discussed at the beginning of this paper: a project involving the assessment of these theories from outside their frameworks, that is, from a feminist perspective; a third phase in the development of feminist theory involves departing from either phallocentric discourses or their critiques, the development of different types of theory, different perspectives and interests to those which prevail.

This chapter has been an exercise in the first and second phases of a self-determined feminist theory. It has consisted in an outline, summary, and discussion of the work of four key male thinkers in French (political) theory, in which the merits and problems of each were noted; it has also begun the process of anti-sexist critique, although clearly feminist objections to their various texts could have been further detailed. The task of developing feminist theory, the third phase described above, has yet to be developed, at least in academic circles. This is the task most urgently facing feminist intellectuals today.

Each of these 'Proper Names' has been a point of reference and a point of departure for feminism. Marxist-feminism gained much of its impetus from Althusser's reading of Marx; those feminists now concerned with psychoanalysis have developed either through object-relations theory (especially American feminists, e.g. Chodorow and Dinnerstein) or through Lacan's reading of Freud. Yet given the convincing political critique of neo-Freudianism articulated by Lacan, it is not clear how feminists committed to radical social change can continue to utilize accounts with such conservative underlying commitments. Between them, Marx and Freud have become virtually indispensable reference points for informed feminist theories.

Foucault and Derrida, and, through their readings of him, Nietzsche, have been used to problematize Althusser's separation of science and truth from ideology, and Lacan's postulate of a single organizing structure in symbolic identity, the phallus. Foucault and Derrida, as post-structuralists, owe an intellectual debt to the structuralist projects of Althusser and Lacan; yet they have both developed beyond the structural traditions in which each was trained to develop critical alternatives, 'genealogy' in Foucault's case and 'deconstruction' in Derrida's. In conflicting ways, they raise the question of the materiality of discursive and non-discursive power relations, and the precarious dependence of dominant forms on repressed, subjugated, or subordinated terms. (Their differences seem, among other

things, to be located in the scope each gives to the discursive domain: for Derrida, 'there is no outside' of discourses. To leave one discourse is to enter another; while, for Foucault, the discursive is identified only with written or spoken texts, texts which are to be located in a non-discursive space.) Feminist theory has the advantage of putting these various discourses to work *against each other*, allowing one patriarchal discourse to challenge another; in this process it may also develop new techniques and values, so that different types of knowing may become possible:

> we ought to be prepared for what I call the 'affirmation of the difference', not a kind of wake about the corpse of the mummified woman, nor a fantasy of woman's decapitation but something different: of her power, her potency, her ever-dreaded strength, of the regions of femininity. Things are starting to be written, things that will constitute a feminine Imaginary, the site, that is, of identifications of an ego no longer given over to an image defined by the masculine but inventing forms for women on the march, or as I prefer to fantasize, 'in flight', so that instead of lying down, women will go forward by leaps in search of themselves.
>
> (Cixous 1981, p. 52)

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All cultural production, including writing, is a collective product. This usually remains unacknowledged in most patriarchal texts. At best, a note of acknowledgement thanking *x* and *y* for typing and/or proof-reading may appear. Production, especially the production of theory, is more profoundly collective than this indicates, for texts are the results of a thinking and a writing or speaking that are effects of our interactions with others (other texts, other people, other women). I have no way of acknowledging all those who contributed to the production of this paper: I discussed the ideas and texts used here with literally scores of others, in a variety of contexts. Lists of names thus do not adequately represent collective contributions, although they may notch up 'credit points' for the more career-oriented. However I would like to single out Moira Gatens, Sneja Gunew, and Cecily Williams for special mention as major sources of inspiration, ideas, and support.

NOTES

1 Throughout this chapter I avoid, where possible, references to sources unavailable in English translation. This means that some of the more relevant textual sources have not been cited. But I think this is counterbalanced by an accessibility of texts to a non-French reader.

2 This was a period when, for a few days and without preplanning, students,

workers, professionals, and radicals seemed on the verge of a major social revolution. A national strike by students, full-scale street fighting, and strikes in factories and offices facilitated a socio-political crisis that signalled a period of transition and upheaval in French political and intellectual life. For further details, see Hirsch (1981, pp. 139–54) and Guattari (1984, pp. 208–17).

3 The earliest explorations of Freudo-Marxism were undertaken by Marcuse (1969) and Reich, especially in 'Dialectical materialism and psychoanalysis' (1972). The project of linking Marx and Freud was revitalized in the late 1960s and early 1970s. There are numerous examples, but perhaps some of the more well-known include Mitchell (1974), Barrett (1980), Chodorow (1980), and Mitchell and Rose (1982).

4 For a feminist critique of Liberal Feminist arguments about equal treatment, see Gatens (1983).

5 He urged solidarity with the PCF, which maintained a basically conservative position. They claimed that the time for revolution was not then, and that it was important to wait for the right moment, when the party itself could lead workers in a united struggle.

6 In 1979 Althusser murdered his wife, a well-known feminist. He was not charged but confined to a psychiatric institution for many years.

7 Because of his provocative relations with the International Psychoanalytic Association, which was and is dominated by ego psychology, Lacan was expelled in 1964. See Turkle (1978) and Clément (1983) for details.

8 The boy is threatened with castration by the Symbolic Father, and, fearing the loss of his penis, he gives up his sexual attachment to the mother. He converts his aggression towards the father into an identification, introjecting his father's authority in the form of the super-ego. With the newly formed super-ego, he performs the first act of primal repression by repressing the desire for his mother. This act provides the first contents for the unconscious, which is constituted as such only as a consequence of primal repression.

9 Saussure, arguably the founder of modern linguistics and semiotics, lectured on linguistics in Geneva between1908 and 1911; his work (with one exception) was posthumously published from lecture-notes compiled and edited by his students, under the title *Course in General Linguistics* in 1916. Freud published *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900 and his metapsychological account, 'The unconscious' in 1914.

10 Jakobson and Halle (1956) argues that the two essential poles of language are similarity (or metaphor) and contiguity (metonymy). Impairment in these linguistic functions, such as occurs in aphasias, results in an inability to participate in language. Similarity is based on our ability to select from a series of similar terms the one appropriate to our purposes. It is a function of selection. Contiguity is the ability to combine the units thus selected into a higher-order linguistic unit. It is thus a function of combination.

11 Foucault elaborates these rules and powers in 'The discourse on language' (1972).

12 Turkle (1978) and Roustang (1982) elaborate in considerable detail the plots, struggles for power, and back-biting involved in the history of the most self-aware of master–disciple relations, psychoanalysis.

13 'But if [feminist projects] were to aim simply at reversing the order of things – let us admit even that it were possible – history would finally return to the same thing. To phallocratism. In which neither their sex, nor their imaginary, nor their language would (re)discover their place of occurrence' (Irigaray 1978, p. 167).

14 Like Derrida's hinge terms they are undecidable, ambiguous, paradoxical terms, baffling binary categorization.

15 For example, Spivak's preface to *Of Grammatology* (1976) and her interview in *Thesis Eleven*, 10/11, 1984–5, where she defends Derrida against certain criticisms; but in her paper in *Displacement* (1983) she is much more critical of his relations to feminism.

16 See, for example, Irigaray (1981); Spivak (1983); and Jardine (1985).

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