Poststructural feminism in education:
An overview

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Feminists in education increasingly use poststructuralism to trouble both discursive and material structures that limit the ways we think about our work. This overview of poststructural feminism presents several key philosophical concepts – language; discourse; rationality; power, resistance, and freedom; knowledge and truth; and the subject – as they are typically understood in humanism and then as they have been reinscribed in poststructuralism, paying special attention to how they have been used in education.

Introduction

Education has long been a fruitful site for feminist work, and both education and feminism have recently taken up theories, methods, and practices that have been categorized under the "post" labels: poststructuralism, postmodernism, post-colonialism, postfoundational, postrevolutionary, postemancipatory, etc. The uneasy tension that was evident in the initial juxtaposition of feminism and poststructuralism[1] has abated somewhat since the referents of these terms have proliferated to such an extent during the last 30 years that a certain exhaustion with trying to fix their meanings has set in. In addition, it is evident from the recent increase in feminist work informed by poststructuralism that the relationship of the two bodies of thought and practice is not inimical but invigorating and fruitful. This essay focuses on some key philosophical concepts – language; discourse; rationality; power, resistance, and freedom; knowledge and truth; and the subject – and examines the ways they are typically understood in humanism and then presents their reinscriptions in postructuralism. Finally, it illustrates how feminists have employed these reinscriptions in their political work for social justice.

Feminism is a highly contested term, as is poststructuralism, so it is impossible to produce a comfortable synthesis from those vertiginous locations, a new foundation on which to situate poststructural feminism.[2] Some rhizomatic[3] hybrid[4] has appeared and continues to become[5] as poststructural feminism is strategically refigured, but not secured, within multiple systems of meaning and in "response to contextual demands for alienation and allegiance" (Chaudhry, 1998, p. 2). As always, when we try to get to the bottom of language and meaning, we find that we are lost in the play of discourse – not by any means an unrewarding experience, but one that can be frustrating for those who want to know exactly what is going on.

In fact, feminists who are fond of poststructural critiques have given up on finding out "exactly" what is going on. They are skeptical of exactly that kind of question, because it is grounded in descriptions of knowledge, truth, rationality, and subjectivity that humanism[6] put forward centuries ago to make sense of a world very different from the one we live in today, one that many now believe requires different inscriptions.

Since man first began to believe that he, as well as God, could, through the proper

use of reason, produce truth and knowledge, humanism has spawned a variety of knowledge projects. It has, in fact, been used by liberals[7], Nazis, feminists, Marxists, Christians, Catholics and other groups in the production of truth. Foucault (1984a) points out, however, that humanism is not an error and therefore "we must not conclude that everything that has ever been linked with humanism is to be rejected, but that the humanistic thematic is in itself too supple, too diverse, too inconsistent to serve as an axis for reflection" (p. 44).

The poststructural critique may also be too supple and diverse for reflection. Butler (1992) explains that theories labeled poststructural, those of Derrida and Lyotard, for example, are just as diverse as those listed above for humanism. Her questions about the reasons for grouping theories that are so different into one category are intriguing: "Do all these theories have the same structure (a comforting notion to the critic who would dispense with them all at once)? Is the effort to colonize and domesticate these theories under the sign of the same, to group them synthetically and masterfully under a single rubric, a simple refusal to grant the specificity of these positions, an excuse not to read, and not to read closely?" (Butler, 1992, p. 5). The point is that the concepts contained within the categories we call *humanism* and *poststructuralism* are so diverse that close readings are required, especially before the casual dismissal of either.

Humanism seems fairly easy to understand since it is a familiar discourse; however, poststructural texts are often labeled "unclear" and "hard to read." There has been a reaction formation to the call for clarity (e.g., Britzman, 1995; Elam, 1994; Lather, 1996a; Trinh, 1989) by those who believe an insistence on clear language represents a "form of academic wordplay that functions as rhetoric rather than serious intellectual work. 'Clarity' is always a distinction made through positions of power both to sanction what is legitimate" (Popkewitz, 1997, p. 18) and to keep the unfamiliar at a distance and illegitimate. Some suspect that the call for clarity is also part of the American discourse of antiintellectualism that, on some level, assumes that the ordinary person cannot understand complexity.

At any rate, easy understanding and easy dismissal are both careless, even unethical practices since they betray, as Butler (1992) points out, an unwillingness to read and think about the theories that both describe and critique our fondest attachments and, most importantly, about the effects on real people of whatever system of meaning our attachments produce. Nietzsche (quoted in Spivak, 1974) warns, "One seeks a picture of the world in *that* philosophy in which we feel freest; i.e., in which our most powerful drive feels free to function" (p. xxvii). Butler (1995) elaborates this warning as follows: "For the question of whether or not a position is right, coherent, or interesting, is in this case, less informative than why it is we come to occupy and defend the territory we do, what it promises us, from what it promises to protect us" (pp. 127–128). Surely, this is the hardest work that we must do, this work of being willing to think differently.

So what is our responsibility to these bodies of thought and practice – humanism and poststructuralism? Rather than place them in a binary opposition that allows no movement and inevitably privileges one or the other, we might, as we attempt to describe them, look at how they function in the world. This is an enormously difficult task since the language, practice, and effects of humanism have been operating for centuries, envelop us every moment, and have become "natural." Humanism is the air we breathe, the language we speak, the shape of the homes we live in, the relations we are able to have with others, the politics we practice, the map that locates us on the earth, the futures we can imagine, the limits of our pleasures. Humanism is everywhere, overwhelming in its totality; and, since it is so "natural," it is difficult to watch it work.

The task of describing and looking at the effects of poststructuralism is also difficult since, though it has been functioning under different labels for centuries, it has only within the last 30 years or so emerged in both popular culture and the academic disciplines as well-articulated theories and methods that can be used to examine the function and effects of whatever structures we have put into place, including any structures that poststructuralism might create. The poststructural critiques described in this essay can be employed to examine any commonplace situation, any ordinary event or process, in order to think differently about that occurrence – to open up what seems "natural" to other possibilities. Foucault (1997/1981) explains as follows: "We have to dig deeply to show how things have been historically contingent, for such and such reason intelligible but not necessary. We must make the intelligible appear against a background of emptiness and deny its necessity. We must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces. To make a truly unavoidable challenge of the question: What can be played?" (pp. 139–140). Poststructural analyses enable this work.

Certain feminists have indeed done close readings of humanism and have not been satisfied with its effects in their lives. They have concluded, in fact, that the world humanism has produced is harmful to women as well as to other groups of people. This is hardly surprising, since patriarchy, racism, homophobia, ageism, etc., are cultural structures, cultural regularities, that humanism allows and perpetuates. These feminists have chosen to employ poststructural critiques both to respond differently to the questions about living that humanism has answered in certain ways and also to ask questions that the discourses and practices of humanism do not allow.

It is important to understand, however, that poststructuralism cannot escape humanism since, as a response to humanism, it must always be implicated in the problematic it addresses. Yet feminists who use poststructural analyses in their work persistently refuse humanism and do find points of exit from its ubiquitous dominance. They are able to do this because humanism, though powerful, produces its own failure with its insistence on setting up boundaries, limits, and grids of regularity and normalcy that, once intelligible, can be disrupted and transgressed.

What, then, is it about humanism that these feminists are refusing? What is it about poststructuralism that they find promising? And the most difficult question that these feminists must answer is, what is poststructuralism protecting them from? This is the obligatory and most rigorous challenge of deconstruction – one of the most powerful poststructural analyses[8] – the charge "persistently to critique a structure that one cannot not (wish to) inhabit" (Spivak, 1993, p. 284). Indeed, the seduction of this double move may be the chief pleasure and pain of poststructural work, what Lather (1996b) describes as "'doing it' and 'troubling it' simultaneously" (p. 3).

Even though humanism and poststructuralism are signs that, like all signs, fall apart when scrutinized, it may be useful to outline several broad themes typically assigned to these bodies of thought and practice in order to continue this discussion of poststructural feminism. Language, is, after all, an important clue that indicates the failure of boundaries and the possibility of resistance and freedom; and by placing humanism *sous rature*[9] we can interrogate what it takes for granted. Spivak (1993) reminds us that "any act must assume unified terms to get started" (p. 130); therefore, we inevitably make grounding mistakes when we attempt to fix even transient meanings of such complex categories as humanism and poststructuralism. Poststructural feminists, however, serve as eloquent models – savvy bricoleurs[10] – women who, having duly struggled with the schizophrenia of language, move resolutely toward faint intelligibilities they hope will enhance the lives of women.

Foucault (1984a) provides a starting point with his description of humanism. He explains that "humanism ... is a theme, or rather, a set of themes that have reappeared on several occasions, over time, in European societies; these themes, always tied to value judgments, have obviously varied greatly in their content, as well as in the values they have preserved" (p. 44). Flax (1990a) describes some of these themes as follows: that "language is in some sense transparent"; that there is "a stable, coherent self"; that "reason and its 'science' – philosophy – can provide an objective, reliable, and universal foundation of knowledge"; that "knowledge acquired from the right use of reason will be 'true'"; that "by grounding claims to authority in reason, the conflicts between truth, knowledge, and power can be overcome"; and that "freedom consists of obedience to laws that conform to the necessary results of the right use of reason" (pp. 41–42). The following discussion will treat each of these themes as well as others in turn – language; discourse; reason; power, resistance, and freedom; knowledge and truth; and the subject – presenting in broad strokes the claims of humanism and the responses of poststructuralism.

Language

Theories of language in humanism generally accept the idea that there is a correspondence, an identity, between a word and something in the world. If words point to preexisting things in the world, then language simply names and reflects what it encounters. One problem with this theory is that it is difficult to produce enough names to match all the different things there are in the world, so often we are forced to group things/ideas/people that are similar but significantly different into the same category. For example, many very different people are slotted into the category *woman*,[11] and their differences across the other identity categories – race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, wellness, etc. – are subsumed under the essence of a single identity category, gender, in an attempt to produce order and regularity. In order to keep such shaky categories intact, it is imperative to define the essence of a category as well as the essence of things in the world, the "thing itself," so they can be matched up. This activity, which is accomplished with language, is the search for identity, and it, of course, privileges identity over difference.

Much work has been done to identify the essence of *woman*. Some feminists, however, are concerned that the desire to fix this essence is dangerous since they believe that *all* the identity categories – race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, wellness, etc. – not just gender, must be taken into account as we think about people's lives. They believe that a person is the "intersection" (e.g., Crenshaw, 1995) of these identity categories; thus, race or wellness, at different times, might be as important to someone as gender. Their concern is that once the differences are erased by identity, people can more easily be slotted into a hierarchy or grid and then manipulated, dismissed, and oppressed.

Much of the work of humanism has been to define the essence of things, to get at that single, unique factor that enables one to identify something or someone and group it with others of its kind in various structures, thus producing, and even enforcing, order out of randomness, accident, and chaos. Foucault's (1970/1966) *archaeology* of the human sciences traces the history of how language has been used to construct binaries, hierarchies, categories, tables, grids, and complex classification schemes that are said to reflect an innate, intrinsic order in the world. In humanism, deep structures, myriad

layers of orderly schemes, provide foundations that ameliorate and support the day-to-day confusion and random nature of living. As these structures are "discovered," they are named and slotted into existing and ever-increasing classificatory schemes.

Since women are usually on the wrong side of binaries and at the bottom of hierarchies, feminists have troubled these structures that often brutalize women. For instance, feminists believe that the first term in binaries such as culture/nature, mind/body, rational/irrational, subject/object[12] is male and privileged and the second term is female and disadvantaged. In order to preserve their distinctions, binaries are more flexible than one might think and operate in subtle ways.

> One term in the distinction will end up being defined more loosely. For instance, *woman* will be the more loosely defined term in the distinction man/woman. This method of defining has the important effect of making the more loosely defined term less vulnerable to unusual situations and making those defined by this term seem less important. So, sticking with the same example, manliness will be defined more clearly and will be treated as a clear type while womanliness will be defined more loosely, as being *more or less* subservient to manliness, and therefore as an inferior type to manliness. (Spinosa & Dreyfus, 1995, p. 758).

Feminists and others representing disadvantaged groups use poststructural critiques of language, particularly deconstruction, to make visible how language operates to produce very real, material, and damaging structures in the world.

To begin with, the poststructural understanding of language troubles the idea that language mirrors the world. This understanding is derived, with significant changes by Derrida (1974/1967), from de Saussure (1959/1916), a structural linguist. Weedon (1987) explains that de Saussure's theory of the sign includes the following ideas:

> Saussure theorized language as an abstract system, consisting of chains of signs. Each sign is made up of a *signifier* (sound or written image) and a *signified* (meaning). The two components of the sign are related to each other in an arbitrary way and there is therefore no natural connection between the sound image and the concept it identifies. The meaning of signs is not intrinsic but relational. Each sign derives its meaning from its difference from all the other signs in the language. It is not anything intrinsic to the signifier "whore," for example, that gives it its meaning, but rather its difference from other signifiers of womanhood such as "virgin" and "mother." (p. 23)

Poststructural thought accepts de Saussure's idea that there is no correspondence between a word and a thing, that signs have no intrinsic meaning but obtain meaning because of their difference from other signs in the language chain. As such, meaning is generated through difference rather than through identity. However, de Saussure's theory does not account for different meanings of the same signifier, but is *logocentric* in that "signs have an already fixed meaning recognized by the self-consciousness of the rational speaking subject" (Weedon, 1987, p. 25).

Poststructuralism thus radically modifies de Saussure's theory by positing that the meaning of the signified is never fixed once and for all but is constantly deferred. Derrida (1974/1967) introduces the concept of *différance*[13] to explain how the meaning of language shifts depending on social context so that meaning can always be disputed. If meaning is thus transient and fleeting, then representation can only ever be a "temporary retrospective fixing" of meaning (Weedon, 1987, p. 25). Since meaning

must always be deferred, we can never know exactly what something means – we can never get to the bottom of things. Once this idea takes hold, neither language nor philosophy can ever be the same.

The poststructural critique of language is discussed most thoroughly in Derrida's (1974/1967) *Of grammatology*, where he "demonstrates the system of ideas which from ancient to modern times has regulated the notion of the sign" and radically deconstructs what that system, the history of philosophy, has "hidden, forbidden, or repressed" (Bass, 1978, p. x). Derrida (1974/1967) theorizes that Western philosophy has been determined by the logic of *presence* that represents transcendental order and permanence as is manifested in ideas such as essence, *logos*, the unified subject, consciousness, and so on. All of these represent the idea of the "thing in itself," a coherent centered center, an absolute knowledge that is transcendental and outside time. "It is this longing for a center, an authorizing pressure," Spivak (1974) explains, "that spawns hierarchized oppositions. The superior term belongs to presence and the *logos*; the inferior serves to define its status and mark a fall" (p. lxix). The first term in a binary thus indicates presence and the power of presence, consciousness, rationality, and so forth.

Derrida's (1974/1967) grammatological analysis, however, illustrates that language works not because there is an *identity* between a sign and a thing, not because of presence, but because there is a *difference*, an absence: "The structure of the sign is determined by the trace or track of that other which is forever absent" (Spivak, 1974, p. xvii). Thus, Derrida set about to critique structures that are held together by identity and presence using an analysis called *deconstruction*.

Deconstruction is a critical practice that aims to "'dismantle [*déconstruire*] the metaphysical and rhetorical structures which are at work, not in order to reject or discard them, but to reinscribe them in another way'" (Derrida, quoted in Spivak, 1974, p. lxxv). Thus, deconstruction is not about tearing down but about rebuilding; it is not about pointing out an error but about looking at how a structure has been constructed, what holds it together, and what it produces. It is not a destructive, negative, or nihilistic practice, but an affirmative one. Spivak (1974) describes deconstruction as follows:

> How to dismantle these structures? By using a signifier not as a transcendental that will unlock the way to truth but as a *bricoleur*'s or tinker's tool – a "positive lever." If in the process of deciphering a text in the traditional way we come across a word that seems to harbor an unresolvable contradiction, and by virtue of being *one* word is made sometimes to work in one way and sometimes in another and thus is made to point away from the absence of a unified meaning, we shall catch at that word. If a metaphor seems to suppress its implications, we shall catch at that metaphor. We shall follow its adventures through the text and see the text coming undone as a structure of concealment, revealing its self-transgression, its undecidability. It must be emphasized that I am not speaking simply of locating a moment of ambiguity or irony ultimately incorporated into the text's system of unified meaning but rather a moment that genuinely threatens to collapse that system (p. lxxv).

The deconstructive method[14] is the point of departure for many of the poststructural analyses that have critiqued the knowledge claims of humanism. "To locate the promising marginal text, to disclose the undecidable moment, to pry it loose with the positive lever of the signifier; to reverse the resident hierarchy, only to displace it; to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is always already inscribed" (p. lxxvii) is

Spivak's (1974) version of deconstruction in a nutshell. With deconstruction, knowledge is not closed, and the myth of finitude explodes, since the critic must always make room for a new concept, the reconstitution, which, in turn, must be deconstructed.

In response to those who believe Derrida argues that there is nothing outside the text, West (1988) explains that Derrida argues instead that "there is nothing outside social practices: intertextuality is a differential web of relations shot through with traces, shot through with activity. For a pragmatist, that activity is always linked to human agency and the context in which that agency is enacted" (p. 270). Language can never be everything; it is always implicated in cultural practice, always produced *in medias res*.

One of the most significant effects of deconstruction is that it foregrounds the idea that language does not simply point to preexisting things and ideas but rather helps to construct them and, by extension, the world as we know it. In other words, we word the world. The "way it is" is not "natural." We have constructed the world as it is through language and cultural practice, and we can also deconstruct and reconstruct it. There are many structures that simply do not exist prior to naming and are not essential or absolute but are created and maintained every day by people. As Butler (1995) says, the foundations are contingent, not necessary, not absolute, and therefore open to change. In fact, if we believe this, then we are all *responsible* for those structures and the damage they do. We cannot appeal to some absolute authority out there somewhere to justify "the way things are." Scheurich (1994) elaborates as follows:

> The structuralists posited deep structures that were opposed to the superficial or the surface. The reason this metaphor is distortive for the poststructuralist is that "deep structural phenomena" and "surface phenomena" both occur at the level of daily human micro-practices. As Foucault has said, all is surface, meaning not that everything is superficial but that everything happens at the surface, i.e., within the context of human activity. (p. 303)

This acknowledgment that foundations have always been contingent may sound well and good, but how can those of us who have been born into humanism and the comfort of its deep structures and absolutes cope with such a radical idea? Culler (1982) describes one poststructural response to this dilemma as follows: "If 'sawing off the branch on which one is sitting' seems foolhardy to men of common sense, it is not so for Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger and Derrida; for they suspect that if they fall there is no 'ground' to hit and that the most clear-sighted act may be a certain reckless sawing, a calculated dismemberment or deconstruction of the great cathedral-like trees in which Man has taken shelter for millennia" (p. 149). Poststructural feminists, for example, are more than happy to give up those deep structures; indeed, they may be thrilled to be freed from the concrete of foundations and absolutes that have constructed and secured them as weak, irrational, powerless, etc.

Derrida's deconstruction serves as a powerful tool for critiquing any structure and is, in fact, a practice of freedom that can help us rewrite the world and ourselves again and again and again. Butler (1995) finds the loss of transcendental foundations energizing rather than paralyzing since she believes it is the very contingency of foundations that provides the agency for political action, and she explains her position as follows:

> This urge to have philosophy supply the vision that will redeem life, that will make life worth living, this urge is the very sign that the sphere of the political has *already* been abandoned. For that sphere will be the one in which those very theoretical

constructions – those without which we imagine we cannot take a step – are in the very process of being lived as ungrounded, unmoored, in tatters, but also, as recontextualized, reworked, in translation, as the very resources from which a postfoundational politics is wrought. Indeed, it is their very ungroundedness which is the condition of our contemporary agency, the very condition for the question : which way should we go? (p. 131)

In this view, it is contingency itself that offers the possibility for freedom and action.

It follows, then, that poststructural feminists believe that the comfort of imagined absolutes and deep structures allows us, women and men, to avoid responsibility for the state of the world. When we say "that's just the way it is," when we place responsibility on some centered presence, some absolute, foundational principles outside the realm of human activity, we may, in fact, be acting irresponsibly.

Poststructuralism does not allow us to place the blame elsewhere, outside our own daily activities, but demands that we examine our own complicity in the maintenance of social injustice. Feminism's slogan that everything is political must be joined with the poststructural idea that "everything is dangerous" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 343). Foucault (1984/1983) explains as follows, "My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do" (p. 343). If everything is both political and dangerous, then we are ethically bound to pay attention to how we word the world. We must pay attention to humanism's desire for unity, coherence, totality, and equilibrium as well as to the language that enacts that desire, a language that produces real, material structures – categories, binaries, hierarchies, grids of intelligibility based on essences – that reward identity and punish difference.

In conclusion, the poststructural response to the language of humanism is critical to and implicated in poststructural responses to all other aspects of humanism. Once we begin to shift our understanding and consider that language is not transparent, that the thing itself always escapes, that absence rather than presence and difference rather than identity produce the world, then the fault line of humanism's structure becomes apparent. At that point, we must begin to use language differently and ask different questions that might produce different possibilities for living. Scott (1988) presents the view of poststructural feminism in this regard as follows: "The questions that must be answered in such an analysis, then, are in what specific contexts, among which specific communities of people, and by what textual and social processes has meaning been acquired? More generally, the questions are: How do meanings change? How have some meanings emerged as normative and others have been eclipsed or disappeared? What do these processes reveal about how power is constituted and operates?" (p. 35). This is the work of poststructural feminism, and educators (e.g., Britzman, 1991; Ellsworth, 1997; Lather, 1996a; Peters, 1996; St. Pierre, 1997a; Walkerdine, 1990) who employ this critique are well aware of how language works to both constrain and open up the everyday lived experiences of those working in education.

Discourse

A discussion of discourse seems particularly useful after a discussion of the poststructural critique of the language of humanism. Foucault's (1971/1970, 1972/1969) work on discourse has changed the way we think about language and how it operates in the

production of the world. In the following, Bové (1990) explains why, if one is working in the poststructural critique, it is difficult to think about discourse, or any other "concept," in traditional ways:

> In light of the new tenor given to "discourse," we can no longer easily ask such questions as, What is discourse? or, What does discourse mean? In other words, an essay like the present one not only does not but *cannot* provide definitions, nor can it answer what come down to essentializing questions about the "meaning" or "identity" of some "concept" named "discourse." To attempt to do so would be to contradict the logic of the structure of thought in which the term "discourse" now has a newly powerful critical function (p. 53).

The point is that poststructuralism is not concerned with asking essentializing questions about the "meaning" of anything, including discourse, since meaning can never be found but must, as Derrida (1974/1967) explains, always be deferred.

Rather, poststructuralism is concerned with a different set of questions: "How does discourse function? Where is it to be found? How does it get produced and regulated? What are its social effects? How does it exist?" (Bové, 1990, p. 54). It is important to remember these questions, since they are the kinds of questions that poststructuralism employs in its analysis of any structure, whether linguistic or social. In Foucault's work, he examines how the discourses of mental illness (*Madness and civilization: A history of insanity in the age of reason*, 1965/1961), punishment (*Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*, 1979/1975) and sexuality (*The history of sexuality: An introduction*, 1978/1976), for example, have been historically produced.

Discourse is critical to poststructuralism since, as Bové (1990) explains, it "provides a privileged entry into the poststructural mode of analysis because it is the organized and regulated, as well as the regulating and constituting, functions of language that it studies: its aim is to describe the surface linkages between power, knowledge, institutions, intellectuals, the control of populations, and the modern state as these intersect in the functions of systems of thought" (pp. 54–55). Scott (1988) explains that "discourse is not a language or a text but a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs" (p. 35). Foucault's theory of discourse illustrates how language gathers itself together according to socially constructed rules and regularities that allow certain statements to be made and not others. "It enables us to understand how *what* is said fits into a network that has its own history and conditions of existence" (Barrett, 1991, p. 126). Even more important, the rules of discourse allow certain people to be subjects of statements and others to be objects. Who gets to speak? Who is spoken? Discourse can never be just linguistic since it organizes a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world.

Once a discourse becomes "normal" and "natural," it is difficult to think and act outside it. Within the rules of a discourse, it makes sense to say only certain things. Other statements and others ways of thinking remain unintelligible, outside the realm of possibility. For example, the questions that Bové asked above are not the kinds of questions that those of us born into the discourse of humanism are trained to ask. Indeed, one must practice "looking awry" (Zizek, 1991, p. 3) at discourse and its effects in order to ask different questions. Thinking differently is possible, however, because discourses are not "closed systems," as Hekman (1990, p. 187) reminds us. "The silences and ambiguities of discourse provide the possibilities of refashioning them, the discovery of other conceptualizations, the revision of accepted truths" (Hekman, 1990, p. 187).

Even though discourse is productive and works in a very material way through social institutions to construct realities that control both the actions and bodies of people, it can be contested. Foucault's theory of discourse illustrates that shifts in historical thought do occur when people think of different things to say; therefore, resistance to discourses of domination is possible.

Indeed, feminists use this theory of discourse to analyze the discursive and material formation, patriarchy, in order to foreground the taken-for-granted assumptions that structure it and enable it to continue to control and oppress women. Clearly, certain commonsense truths about men and women must be accepted in order for the discourse of patriarchy to function. Feminists analyzing patriarchy ask Bové's questions: How does patriarchy function in the world? Where is it to be found? How does it get produced and regulated? What are its linguistic, social, and material effects on women? How does it continue to exist? What are its differences from itself? Once these questions can be asked of the specific, local, everyday situations that oppress women, and once the working of patriarchy is made intelligible at the level of micropractice, women can begin to make different statements about their lives. Once they can locate and name the discourses and practices of patriarchy, they can begin to refuse them. Poststructural theories of discourse, like poststructural theories of language, allow us to understand how knowledge, truth, and subjects are produced in language and cultural practice as well as how they might be reconfigured. The "linguistic turn" in history has thus produced powerful and subversive analyses – e.g., deconstruction, queer theory, rhizoanalysis – that educators (Alvermann, in press; Davies, in press; Elam, 1994; Leach; in press; McCoy, 1997; Pinar & Reynolds, 1992; Pillow, 1997; Sears, 1992; Spanos, 1993; Spivak, 1993; St. Pierre, 1997b; Stronach & MacLure, 1997; Thorne, 1993) have adopted in their work for social justice.

Rationality

A certain kind of rationality undergirds humanism, one that is increasingly under attack by groups, including feminists, who have been its victim. In humanism, particularly Enlightenment humanism, a unified, transcendent human reason is the sole standard of rationality, one "which allegedly underwrites all knowledge claims, irrespective of time and place" (Peters, 1996, p. 2). Reason is thus a grand narrative[15] that defines humanism's discourses and does so by claiming to stand outside those very discourses and the practices they produce. By removing itself from the realm of human activity, reason supposedly remains untainted by the messiness, the chaotic nature – the irrationality – of daily existence.

In the Enlightenment, reason became the basis of the scientific method, and any kind of rationality not formed by science was considered irrational and therefore suspect. Serres (1995/1990) takes issue with the postivistic model of rationality that has dominated the sciences. "Now, I maintain," he writes, "that there is as much reason in the works of Montaigne or Verlaine as there is in physics or biochemistry, and reciprocally, that often there is as much unreason scattered through the sciences as there is in certain dreams. Reason is statistically distributed everywhere; no one can claim exclusive rights to it" (Serres, 1995/1990, p. 50).

Serres's comments notwithstanding, the discourse of Enlightenment humanism defined, and continues to define, a particular kind of reason that has become dominant, one that Lyotard (1984/1979), in fact, believes is terroristic and violent. Lather (1990) elaborates as follows:

> Conceptions of reason and logic are not innocent. Standards of rationality have functioned historically to impose definitions of human nature from whence we deduce what we call common sense.[16] It is in breaking out of common sense that we escape existing rationality, the exercise of power disguised as reason. To dissolve the rational/irrational binary is to break into some radical disjuncture with what is, some open space from which we can reinscribe otherwise by embracing that which has historically been labeled irrational, a different kind of reason that can only be unreasonable by the hegemonic[17] standards of reason. (p. 329)

The poststructural critique obliges us to ask questions, like Foucault's (1984b), about this reason: "*What* is the Reason that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and what are its dangers?" (p. 249).

Poststructural analyses, in fact, enable the "breaking apart of reason: Deleuzian schizophrenia.[18] Postmodernity reveals, at last, that reason has only been one narrative among others in history; a grand narrative, certainly, but one of many, which can now be followed by other narratives" (Foucault, 1983, p. 205). Foucault (1983) explains as follows:

> What reason perceives as *its* necessity, or rather, what different forms of rationality offer as their necessary being, can perfectly well be shown to have a history; and the network of contingencies from which it emerges can be traced. Which is not to say, however, that these forms of rationality were irrational. It means that they reside on a base of human practice and human history; and that since these things have been made, they can be unmade, as long as we know how it was that they were made. (p. 206)

Poststructural analyses, therefore, point out that reason cannot be a transcendent absolute, since it too is contingent and historical. Reason, like all other concepts, is produced within discourses in which certain statements are privileged and others are silenced or excluded. Therefore, poststructuralism acknowledges and investigates multiple forms of rationality produced by the codes and regularities of various discourses and cultural practices.

The proliferation of reason certainly does not mean that we either discard it or privilege the irrational, since both of those alternatives maintain the rational/irrational binary. Spivak (1993) points out that we need reason to make sense of the world and, "rather than lament reason, [we might] put it in a useful place" (p. 240). Mouffe (1988), like Spivak, is interested in how we think about reason once the idea of a transcendental reason has been displaced, and she reminds us that giving up on a foundational reason does not mean that we can no longer act reasonably. "Affirming that one cannot provide an ultimate rational foundation for any given system of values does not imply that one considers all views to be equal. ... It is always possible to distinguish between the just and the unjust, the legitimate and the illegitimate, but this can only be done from within a given tradition, with the help of standards that this tradition provides; in fact, there is no point of view external to all tradition from which one can offer a universal judgment" (Mouffe, 1988, p. 37). Reason is always situated, local, and specific, formed by values and passions and desires.

Feminists have celebrated the proliferation of reason, with good reason, since they have historically been fixed on the wrong side of the rational/irrational binary. "Woman is always the 'other' that is opposed to the pursuit of truth, a pursuit that is exclusively masculine," according to Hekman (1990), who reminds us that, "Nietzsche

is one of the first critics of modernism to reveal that the 'deconstruction' of western rationality necessarily entails the rejection of the masculine definition of 'truth'" (p. 28). As Lather (1990) explained above, it is necessary to trouble the rational/-irrational opposition in order to find a different space in which to think about reason. It is, in fact, urgent that feminists do this work.

Indeed, feminists scholars have been unraveling this binary for decades as they have analyzed how this hierarchy has been historically established and then perpetuated in Western scientific, political, and cultural discourses. Liberalism, a political and social project of the Enlightenment, established the "Man of Reason" (Hekman, 1990, p. 35) as the quintessential knower, the one who can uncover the Truth.[19] Historically, women have been associated with nature and men with culture; thus, the culture/nature binary. This opposition fixes women in the realm of the natural, the sensual, and the emotional and, conversely, men in the realm of culture, thought, and reason. "Not only are women deemed irrational and hence not fully human, but, because of their association with nature, they are also associated with unknown, dark, and mysterious forces" (Hekman, 1990, p. 36).

Liberal feminists, whose goal is equal rights with men, seem not to take issue with the rational/irrational binary but instead want women, as well as men, to be acknowledged as rational creatures. Other feminists argue that "such a move is both futile and self-defeating because the liberal-Enlightenment conception of reason is distorted. Thus it cannot and should not be a conception that we, as feminists, seek to emulate" (Hekman, 1990, p. 36). The poststructural critique of rationality, which has been discussed above, enters the argument at this point, and poststructural feminists work to make intelligible the assumptions – the common sense – that allows such a binary to exist. Further, they work to describe transformations of "rationality" and the effects of those trans-formations in local, specific, historical situations.

To end on an ironic note, poststructuralists, here Foucault (1984/1971), question the significance of rationality in the history of civilization. If one "listens to history, [examines] the history of reason, he learns that it was born in an altogether 'reasonable' fashion – from chance; devotion to truth and the precision of scientific methods arose from the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred, their fanatical and unending discussions, and their spirit of competition – the personal conflicts that slowly forged the weapons of reason" (p. 78). In this view, reason has never been objective or a foundation of true knowledge but has always been produced by passion and chance and accident within the realm of human activity. This understanding of reason pervades the work of poststructural educators (Harding, 1991; Hekman, 1990; Nicholson, 1990, 1999; Scheurich, 1997; Schiebinger, 1989).

Power, resistance, and freedom

Power, resistance, and freedom are related concepts that have been much discussed and theorized in humanism. They have, however, been reinscribed in poststructuralism. In humanism, power is generally considered to be the product of agency, a "universal resource to which all humans *qua* humans have access" (Butler, 1995, p. 136). Therefore, we are naturally endowed with agency, which first exists outside ourselves, and it gives us the power to act in the public world. Power, then, is also something we possess; and we can deploy it – give it away, take it back, etc. Power is often thought to be inherently evil; therefore, those concerned with social justice often try to give away

some of their power to avoid domination; they try to "empower" those less fortunate than themselves. Resistance to domination is practiced by self-contained, autonomous individuals in response to an oppressive force from the outside, a force that challenges both the natural and political liberty of the individual. In this sense, resistance is thought to be an act of negation that nullifies or counteracts an infringement of rights.

In humanism, freedom is another of those universal resources, like agency, that is available to everyone as a natural right. The *Random House unabridged dictionary of the English language* (2nd ed.), a careful compilation of the meaning of the language and discourse of humanism, defines freedom variously as "the state of being free or at liberty rather than in confinement or under physical restraint," "exemption from external control, interference, regulation," and "the power to determine action without restraint." These definitions employ liberal humanism's understanding of liberty as a state of being within society that can be both negative and positive in that freedom must guarantee, first, noninterference with the independent and autonomous individual who is born a free agent and, second, must guarantee the ability of that individual to act, i.e., must guarantee an almost "non-restriction of options – whether by other men's obstruction or by factors internal to the agent himself" (Gray, 1995, p. 58). Those who possess the freedom and agency to break through such internal or external "barriers of power are considered heroic or bearers of a universal capacity which has been subdued by oppressive circumstances" (Butler, 1995, p. 136). Butler (1995) calls this an "emancipatory model of agency" (p. 136). Gray (1995) sums up this description of freedom as follows: "A free man is one who possesses the rights and privileges needed for him to think and act autonomously – to rule himself, and not be ruled by another" (p. 59).

These descriptions of power, resistance, and freedom have been inspiring and encouraging to subordinated groups such as women, homosexuals, poor people, people of color, old people, and others who formed social movements during the 1960s and 1970s to resist obstacles imposed by and to fight for emancipation from the dominance of those historically privileged in Western culture – those autonomous individuals born with easy access to freedom and agency, those possessed of unlimited options, those who are white, wealthy, male, heterosexual, youthful, able-bodied, etc. The postwar social movements that responded to the obvious failure of humanism to correct the problems of human existence – the second wave of the women's movement,[20] the civil rights movement, socialists, the gray panthers, the gay and lesbian movements – have all employed humanism's understanding of these foundational concepts.

Yet even as these groups organized under the banner of emancipation, others in the human sciences – history, philosophy, literature and literary criticism, psychology, art, architecture, music, anthropology, sociology, etc. – began to theorize different descriptions based on postfoundational, postrevolutionary, postemancipatory analyses of human existence.

In these theories, power is no longer considered to belong to an individual or to be negative. Foucault (1997/1984) theorizes that it exists in *relations*; therefore, he hardly ever uses the word "power" but speaks of "power relations" or "relations of power."[21] The following long quotation describes Foucault's (1997/1984) theory of power relations:

> When I speak of *relations of power*, I mean that in human relationships … power is always present: I mean a relationship in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other … these power relations are mobile, they can be modified,

they are not fixed once and for all … [they are] thus mobile, reversible, and unstable. It should also be noted that power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free. If one of them were completely at the other's disposal and became his thing, an object on which he could wreak boundless and limitless violence, there wouldn't be any relations of power. Thus, in order for power relations to come into play, there must be at least a certain degree of freedom on both sides. Even when the power relation is completely out of balance, when it can truly be claimed that one side has " total power" over the other, a power can be exercised over the other only insofar as the other still has the option of killing himself, of leaping out the window, or of killing the other person. This means that in power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all. This being the general form, I refuse to reply to the question I am sometimes asked : "But if power is everywhere, there is no freedom." I answer that if there are relations of power in every social field, this is because there is freedom everywhere. Of course, states of domination do indeed exist. In a great many cases, power relations are fixed in such a way that they are perpetually asymmetrical and allow an extremely limited margin of freedom. (p. 292)

According to Foucault, power is not something that can be " acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (Foucault, 1978/1976, p. 94). One of Foucault's (1978/1976) most important statements about power is that it " comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled as the root of power relations … no such duality extending from the top down" (p. 94).

Foucault (1978/1976) differentiates between " power" and power relations as follows: "'Power,' insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities … power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are all endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (p. 93). Halperin (1995) explains that the humanist task of identifying and confronting someone who seems to have power does not work given this understanding of power, since the relationship itself is imbued with and characterized by power. " Power is thus a dynamic *situation*, whether personal, social, or institutional" (Halperin, 1995, p. 17). Even though power relations are multiplicities that are not fixed once and for all but are " unbalanced, heterogeneous, unstable, and tense" (Foucault, 1978/1976, p. 93), they can be coded in ways that integrate them, thus producing strategies such as politics or war.

Too, particular " homogenizations, serial arrangements, and convergences" (Foucault, 1978/1976, p. 94) of practices can produce states of domination by blocking relations of power. This means that even though power does not exist inherently in the state or the law or a ruler, these formations may be " the terminal forms power takes" (Foucault, 1978/1976, p. 92). Relations of power may be blocked at the personal as well as the institutional level. A state of domination exists, for example, when a child is " subjected to the arbitrary and unnecessary authority of a teacher" or when a " student is put under the thumb of a professor who abuses his authority" (Foucault, 1997/1984, p. 299). Foucault (1978/1976) describes a strategical model of power rather than a

juridical one and offers a method of analyzing shifting, unstable power relations in which the "effects of domination are produced" (p. 102).

Foucault not only rethinks the location of power but also its nature. He suggests that power is neither inherently evil nor a negative, repressive force. He writes, "we must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes,' it 'represses,' it 'censors,' it 'abstracts,' it 'masks,' it 'conceals'." In fact power produces; it produces reality" (Foucault, 1979/1975, p. 194). Power is productive and can be found in the effects of liberty as well as in the effects of domination. "Power is games of strategy. ... To wield power over the other in a sort of open-ended strategic game where the situation may be reversed is not evil" (Foucault, 1997/1984, p. 298). What is important then is to analyze relations of power in order to learn what is being produced: reversible strategic games or the "states of domination that people ordinarily call 'power'" (Foucault, 1997/1984, p. 299).

In *Discipline and punish*, Foucault (1979/1975) describes a different kind of power, *disciplinary power*, and he uses Jeremy Bentham's architectural figure of the panopticon to illustrate how it functions. In the late nineteenth century, Bentham (1995) described "a simple idea in architecture" (p. 1), a prison, that is very different from a dungeon in which prisoners are hidden and deprived of light. Bentham's panopticon is a prison in which a guard stands in a central tower from which he can observe at all times prisoners located in cells arranged in a circle around the tower. Since they are visible and believe they are always under surveillance by the guard whom they cannot see, the prisoners begin to discipline themselves, even when the guard is not present. Foucault (1979/1975) writes:

> Hence, the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. (p. 201)

Disciplinary power works invisibly because of the visibility of the prisoner. The inmate is constantly being seen, examined, and subjected – he is the trapped object of the guard's gaze. "In this space of domination, disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects" (Foucault, 1979/1975, p. 187).

Elaborating the image of the panopticon, Foucault (1979/1975) goes on to describe what he calls the modern "disciplinary society" (p. 209) that has emerged since the Enlightenment. He describes all sorts of disciplinary mechanisms, practices, technologies, and institutions such as the military, psychiatry, the school, the workshop, the state, the examination, the "disciplines" of academia, the "minute disciplines, the panopticisms of every day" (Foucault, 1979/1975, p. 223), that maintain the surveillance of people. He believes that there has been a radical shift in the way the state maintains control over its population, a shift from the sovereign state in which rulers disciplined by inflicting bodily harm on offenders to the modern disciplinary state in which the more efficient mechanism of self-discipline operates to control the population. Discipline blocks relations of power in that it objectifies and fixes people under its gaze and does not allow them to circulate in unpredictable ways. Modern society, therefore, has not been progressing toward a freer, more enlightened state but, instead, has

become increasingly colonized by disciplinary power that proliferates and is diffused into every aspect of human life.

To offset this bleak picture of disciplinary power is a poststructural description of resistance. If one can never be outside relations of power, whether disciplinary or otherwise, then resistance is always possible, and, most importantly, "power relations are obliged to change with the resistance" (Foucault, 1997/1984, p. 167). Therefore, resistance, like power, is less a thing than an effect of a relation of power. It is not a single, unifying concept; rather, there are a multiplicity of resistances, just as there are a multiplicity of relations of power. "Just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities" (Foucault, 1978/1976, p. 96). Resistance to asymmetrical relations of power is "distributed in irregular fashion: the points, knots, or focuses of resistance are spread over time and space at varying densities, at times mobilizing groups of individuals in a definitive way, inflaming certain points of the body, certain moments in life, certain types of behavior. Are there no great radical ruptures, massive binary divisions, then? Occasionally, yes. But more often one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance" (Foucault, 1978/1976, p. 96).

Given that resistance is inevitable in power relations, the "problem is knowing where resistance will organize" (Foucault, 1997/1984, p. 292). Foster (1996) explains that "a regime of power also prepares its resistance, calls it into being, in ways that cannot always be recouped" (p. 212). Just as multiple and diverse power relations can be strategically codified into states of domination, so too can multiple and diverse points of resistance be codified into a revolution. Revolution, however, is a totalizing attempt to overthrow power once and for all and establish freedom from oppression. Poststructural theories of power and resistance doubt that this is possible and believe instead that the analysis of and resistance within power relations must proceed on a case-by-case basis. This theory of resistance assumes that "there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary" (Foucault, 1978/1976, p. 96). Instead, resistance is generally local, unpredictable, and constant. Halperin (1995) explains that "what escapes from relations of power" and something always does escape, according to Foucault – does not escape from the reach of power to a place outside power, but represents the limit of power; its reversal or rebound. *The aim of an oppositional politics is therefore not liberation but resistance*" (pp. 17–18).

If liberation from relations of power is no longer possible, of what does freedom consist? Rajchman (1985) suggests that freedom can no longer be some shining, elusive ideal that manifests itself in revolution or reform but is, in fact, a revolt within a set of everyday, concrete practices that has become commonplace or "natural" and that defines and limits us as individuals. We are not born free; we are born into relations of power from which we cannot escape. Sawicki (1991) takes this to the personal level and explains "freedom does not basically lie in discovering or being able to determine who we are, but in rebelling against those ways in which we are already defined, categorized, and classified" (p. 27). The charge demanded by this kind of freedom is a "constant 'civil disobedience' within our constituted experience" (Rajchman, 1985, p. 6), an ongoing resistance to how we are being constituted and are constituting ourselves as subjects. In a sense, this is a negative freedom in that we must attempt to free ourselves from ourselves.

Rajchman (1985) explains that, for Foucault, this "freedom is not liberation, a

process with an end. It is not liberty, a possession of each individual person. It is the motor and principle of his skepticism: the endless questioning of constituted experience" (Rajchman, 1985, p. 7). The good news is that once we give up the idea of a unified, totalizing idea of revolution, emancipation, liberation, transformation, and reform, we begin to understand that people "are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes that have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed" (Foucault, 1988b/1982, p. 10). What may seem necessary or set in stone hardly ever is. Poststructuralism suggests that life is the way it is because of accidental and unintended convergences in history; because of the arbitrary desires and passions of individuals; because certain discourses, for no particular reason perhaps, became more important than others; and because anonymous and contingent forms of knowledge have produced practices that can be contested and changed. Thus, the space of freedom available to us is not at all insignificant, and we have the ability to analyze, contest, and change practices that are being used to construct ourselves and the world, as well as the practices we ourselves are using in this work of praxis.[22]

Poststructural feminists have found these theories of power, resistance, and freedom useful in their work for social justice. Because of the complexity of women's lives, they find it impositional to define one grand vision of liberation for all women. Indeed, though many different women do organize at critical times to fight for certain issues, others resist those agendas and do not desire others' particular brand of liberation. In particular, women have grown increasingly wary of some feminists' desire to empower and liberate them and see this practice as impositional and arrogant. African-American feminists (e.g., Collins, 1990; hooks, 1989; Lorde, 1984; Williams, 1991) have been clear about the very different projects and goals of feminists of color and white feminists. Feminists who work in the area of "postcolonial theory" (e.g., Ashcroft et al., 1995; Behar, 1993; Chaudhry, 1997; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Spivak, 1993; Trinh, 1989) have very different projects than either African-American or white feminists. Post-structural feminists believe the struggles of women are local and specific rather than totalizing. Relations of power are complex and shifting. Resistance and freedom are daily, ongoing practices. Humanism's totalizing understanding of power, resistance, and freedom seems to allow less room to maneuver, fewer possibilities for social justice than that of the poststructural critique. In education, these understandings of power, resistance, and freedom have produced more complex and subtle analyses of desires, relationships, strategies, and structures (e.g., Butler, 1997; Cherryholmes, 1988; Finders, 1997; Fraser, 1989; Gitlin, 1994; Kemmis, 1995; Lather, 1991; Munro, 1998; Orner, 1992; Radtke & Stam, 1994).

Knowledge and truth

Knowledge and truth, and, indeed, power, are implicated in each other in such complex ways in both humanism and poststructuralism that they will be discussed together in this section. Though humanism has produced a variety of knowledge projects, ideas associated with three – the Cartesian (Reneé Descartes, 1596–1650), the Hegelian (George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, 1770–1831), and positivism (Auguste Comte, 1798–1857) – have had remarkable longevity even after centuries of critique and will be described briefly here before moving to the poststructural critiques of the epistemology of humanism.

Descartes, a founder of the modern age, responded to what he believed were faults

in the classical *episteme* of Aristotle by rejecting those foundations he had accepted all his life as true and rethinking them for himself. He writes, "my plan has never been more than to try to reform my own thoughts and to build upon a foundation which is completely my own" (Descartes, 1993/1637, p. 9). With this statement, Descartes established foundationalism, the view that knowledge must be constructed from the bottom up; that first principles, truths, can be discovered using the mind of man; and that this foundation can shore up an ordered, unified structure of truths that are logically linked together.

The method he used to establish his foundation is generally called the "method of systematic doubt," which involves examining all one's beliefs in order to learn whether there is a reason for doubting their certainty. Descartes's method convinced him to reject all knowledge based on the senses, the external world, because that knowledge changes and is therefore unreliable. In the end, he decided that all he could be sure of was that he was doubting and thinking and that he existed. "I noticed that, during the time I wanted thus to think that everything was false, it was necessary that I, who thought thus, must be something. And noticing that this truth – *I think, therefore I am* – was so firm and so certain that the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics were unable to shake it, I judged that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking" (Descartes, 1993/1637, p. 19). With these words, Descartes established the mind/body dualism – that master binary of self/other – and the notion of the conscious, thinking subject as the author of knowledge. In his epistemology, the mind is superior to the senses, a thought is independent of its object, and the knower is separate from the known. With this concept of knowledge goes the idea that there is indeed a reality "out there" that the mind can discover, describe, and know.[23]

Descartes settled on another foundational principle by saying that, since he could conceive of the idea of a supremely perfect being, one must exist. In addition, he believed that God had, in fact, given man a rational intellect in order to avoid error and illuminate[24] or make clear the confusion of the sensual, material world. Knowledge produced by the intellect, God's gift, is thus the only knowledge that can be true, foundational. As part of his commitment to clarity, Descartes attempted to control the confusion of the natural world by reducing its phenomena to arithmetic and geometric quantifications; in fact, he mathematized science.

Descartes's philosophy was a radical challenge to the religious and political authorities of the feudal age. His privileging of man's intellect meant that any rational man, not just priests interpreting God's will or wise sovereigns, could discover truth. His philosophy continues to exert a powerful hold on science, and so many twentieth-century Western discourses employ his worldview that it now seems "natural." His search for metaphysical foundations; his privileging of the intellect over the material; his belief that the essence of man centers on the God-given faculty of reason; and his description of man as a rational, detached agent who can subdue unruly emotions and uncover true knowledge continue to make him a central figure in modern Western philosophy.

Like Descartes, Hegel wanted to develop a systematic philosophy with logically interrelated theories that would account for the categories of both the natural world and human activity. At least three of his theories are still circulating in twentieth-century thought. The first theory, which is central to Hegel's philosophy, is the idea that history is progress toward freedom. The implication of this idea is that the present is always better than the past because we are proceeding in a teleological[25] fashion from the

contradiction, fragmentation, and confusion of the present toward the harmony and freedom of some basic unity in the future. Hegel believed that there was a reason for the course of history and that at some point in the future man would be able to understand that explanation.

Hegel's theory of progress toward understanding and therefore freedom leads to a second theory, that of absolute knowledge, the moment when the mind finally knows itself, when man finally understands and masters all there is to know, when man becomes a "self-sufficient subject for whom all things apparently different finally emerge as immanent features of the subject itself" (Butler, 1987, p. 6). This moment of absolute knowledge is, in effect, the totalizing closure of knowledge.

Finally, Hegel believed that dialectical oppositions such as subject/object and rational/irrational could be resolved and made compatible by thinking them together from some higher order perspective. His claim that our fundamental principles are based on such a dialectical development indicates a desire to subsume difference under identity. The Hegelian dialectic,[26] the eventual compatibility and resolution of oppositions, privileges unity, wholeness, and sameness over the partial, the fragmented, and the different.

Comte, the founder of positivism as well as sociology, believed, in contrast to Descartes, that true knowledge of the world could be based only on observation. He believed that scientific thought developed through three stages: theological, meta-physical, and positivistic, which was the final, truly scientific stage. Positivism involves a rejection of knowledge produced in the other two stages, knowledge about causes and the essence of things, and a reliance solely on knowledge gained from observing the sensible universe. For that reason, Comte abandoned theology and metaphysics, both of which concern themselves with speculation about the unknowable.

Having thereby limited knowledge, Comte set about to discover all-inclusive laws, *laws of phenomena*, to which every phenomenon in the material world could be subjected. The work of the scientist was to produce those laws so that man could organize knowledge, predict what would happen in the future based on past activity, control nature, and aid in the progress of mankind.

Comte saw positivism as a totalizing philosophy because he believed it was applicable to the social as well as to the natural world. As a result, he founded a new science, sociology, whose purpose was to describe the facts and laws of social life as scientifically as mathematics and physics describe those of the physical world. Like Descartes, Comte believed that observation provides unmediated access to the world and its features. He concluded that true scientific knowledge is based on facts garnered from the observation or visual experience of either the material or social worlds. Once again, we find the idea that there is a reality "out there" separate from the rational, scientific mind (the subject/object dualism) and that its truth can be discovered through careful, rigorous observation.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the philosophies of Descartes, Hegel, and Comte continue to influence the way we think about knowledge and truth. The mind/body dualism, foundationalism, the primacy of the intellect, the belief that the conscious, thinking subject is the author of knowledge, the idea that the history of mankind is progressing toward a harmonious resolution of conflict and difference, the belief that true knowledge is produced through the rational observation and description of a reality detached from the observer, the idea that the purpose of science is to predict and control, the idea that a positivist science can produce true knowledge about both the material and social worlds, and the concept of absolute knowledge are all theories

that have operated for centuries to construct a particular version of knowledge and truth that seems almost impossible to disrupt.

Yet this inscription, like humanism's inscriptions of language, discourse, reason, power, resistance, and freedom, has been critiqued for its insufficiency. To begin with, poststructural theorists doubt that knowledge can be free from error, illusion, or the political – that it can be outside the field of human activity. Foucault (1979/1975) writes, "power and knowledge directly imply one another; there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (p. 27). To explore this issue, Foucault (1965/1961, 1970/1966, 1972/1969, 1973/1963) developed a particular poststructural analysis called *archaeology* to answer the question, "how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?" (Foucault, 1972/1969, p. 27). The purpose of archaeology is to study the history of statements (knowledge), to describe the "systems of rules, and their transformations, which make different kinds of statements possible" (Davidson, 1986, p. 222). The assumption of the archaeologist is that the emergence of knowledge is not natural or necessarily based on scientific rigor or rationality or cause and effect but is constructed[27] within the play of the power relations circulating in discourse and cultural practice. "Knowledge is not a systematic tracking down of a truth that is hidden but may be found" (Spivak, 1974), p. xix). It is not beyond the influence of people's desires or relations of power but "that of which one can speak in a discursive practice" (Foucault, 1972/1969, p. 182). Clearly, power is very much implicated in the production of knowledge. What can be said? Who can say it?

In an archaeological analysis that examines the history of a discourse, the concern, then, is not with facts or dates or either causal or antagonistic relationships among people and events[28] but with the historical conditions, assumptions, and power relations that allow certain statements, and by extension, certain discourses to appear. What are the conditions of possibility that enable language to become rational discourse? For example, how did the discourse of madness (Foucault, 1965/1961) or the medical clinic (Foucault, 1973/1963) or biology or sociology become structured into recognizable and legitimate domains of knowledge?

When historians use an archaeological analysis to take a broader look at the relationships among various discursive formations or epistemic domains, they do not find the indefinite teleology, the consistent progress toward resolution and closure that Hegel posited. Instead of the metanarrative of progress, they find that such domains of knowledge "do not succeed each other dialectically, nor do they aggregate. They simply appear alongside one another – catastrophically, as it were, without rhyme or reason. Thus, the appearance of a new 'human science' does not represent a 'revolution' in thought or consciousness" (White, 1978, p. 234). The new discourse simply moves into spaces left empty by other discourses. This observation led Foucault (1980/1977) to write, "history has no meaning" (p. 114).

Archaeological analyses disrupt the standard practice of grouping ideas and events around particular writers and their books or into well-defined categories, historical periods, and disciplines. History rests on the fragile contingencies and precarious convergences of human activity, not on transcendental absolutes. "We want historians to confirm our belief that the present lies upon profound intentions and immutable necessities. But the true historical sense confirms our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark or a point of reference" (Foucault, 1984/1971, p. 89). History's lack of necessity, however, can be invigorating, since if "things have been

made, they can be unmade, as long as we know how it was that they were made'' (Foucault, 1988/1983, p. 37). That analysis, that work of "excavating our own culture in order to open a free space for innovation and creativity" (Foucault, 1988a/1982) is the work of the archaeologist.

If Foucault's archaeology examines the relation between truth and knowledge, his *genealogy* examines the relation between truth and power. Intrigued by how statements come to be true or false within discourses and domains of knowledge, Foucault (1978/1976, 1979/1975, 1984/1971, 1984/1983), following Nietzsche (1992/1887), developed a second historical analysis, similar in some respects to archaeology, called genealogy. Genealogy allows the analyst to trace the ways in which discourses constitute objects that can be examined as either true or false according to the codes of the discourse. "Not unless a statement is about an 'object' and can be judged in its truthfulness does it enter into a discourse; but once it does, it furthers the dispersal of that discourse and enlarges the realm of objects and statements which produce knowledge that can be judged legitimate or illegitimate" (Bové, 1990, p. 58). A genealogical analysis is not a metaphysical search for an origin, a foundation, or a truth that precedes the material world and props it up but a patient and rigorous description, a documentary, an accumulation of details, "errors," "minute deviations," "false appraisals," and "faulty calculations" (Foucault, 1984/1971) that operate to produce truth. The genealogist studies the discourses and social practices represented in historical documents to learn how homosexuality, for example, became an object of knowledge about which truth can be spoken.

"When genealogy looks to beginnings, it looks for accidents, chance, passion, petty malice, surprises, feverish agitation, unsteady victories, and power" (Davidson, 1986, p. 224). Nietzsche (1954/1873), describing the fragile nature of truth, writes that it is "a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are" (pp. 46–47).

Foucault (1984/1983), for example, finds in Descartes's philosophy an example of a rupture in the discourse of truth, a rupture that breaks the link between morality and truth. He believes that Descartes, in fact, states that "'To accede to truth it suffices that I be *any* subject that can see what is evident' ... Thus, I can be immoral and know the truth. I believe this is an idea that, more or less explicitly, was rejected by all previous cultures. Before Descartes, one could not be impure, immoral, and know the truth. With Descartes, direct evidence is enough" (Foucault, 1984/1983, pp. 371–372). What, then, is our responsibility to the truth? A poststructuralist might respond that it is to examine the "regime of truth" (Foucault, 1980/1977, p. 133) or "games of truth" (Foucault, 1997/1984, p. 297) from which statements, scientific or otherwise, are produced, knowing that power relations are always already[29] implicated in discussions of truth and knowledge. Foucault (1980/1977) explains the relationship of truth and power as follows:

> The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power. ... Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable

one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (p. 131)

Foucault does not say that truth does not exist. In fact, he writes, "I believe too much in truth not to suppose that there are different truths and different ways of speaking the truth" (Foucault, 1988/1984, p. 51). Belsey (1993/1989) cautions, "It might be worth a digression here to stress the argument that to abandon truth is not necessarily to embrace the free-for-all of radical subjectivism. … It is perfectly possible to recognize lies without entailing the possibility of telling the truth, least of all the whole truth. … You can tell it like you know it, in accordance with the rules of the discourse, without having to claim that you're telling it like it (absolutely, metaphysically, incontrovertibly) *is*" (pp. 555–556). She goes on to suggest that women generally seem to have less trouble giving up a transcendental than men because of their marginalized status. Since they often do not participate in the construction of truth, they are not so attached to it. Belsey (1993/1989) quotes Catherine MacKinnon as saying that Cartesian doubt "'comes from the luxury of a position of power that entails the possibility of making the world as one thinks it to be'" (p. 556). Trinh (1989) echoes this sentiment with her question about truth and power, "What is true and what is not, and who decides so if we wish not to have this decision made *for* us" (p. 134). Feminists like Trinh have long been convinced that the truth of things is determined within relations of power.

Critics of poststructural critiques of a transcendental, foundational truth often raise the issue of *relativism* at this point in the conversation. Yet, as discussed throughout this essay, the questions one asks about truth, or any other concept, are different in poststructuralism than they are in the structuralism of humanism. Cherryholmes (1988) explains the issues around relativism as follows:

Relativism is an issue for structuralists because they propose structures that set standards. Relativism is an issue if a foundational structure *exists* that is ignored … . A Derridean might argue, however, that the issue is one of *différance*, where meanings are dispersed and deferred. If dispersion and deferral are the order of the day, what is relative under structuralism is *différance* under deconstruction. If there is a foundation, there is something to be relative to; but if there is no foundation, there is no structure against which other positions can be "objectively" judged. (p. 185)

Mouffe (1988) echoes Foucault's (1988/1984) earlier statement about the importance of the truth in response to the charge of relativism against poststructuralism, "such an accusation makes sense only if one remains in the thrall of a traditional problematic,[30] which offers no alternative between objectivism and relativism. Affirming that one cannot provide an ultimate rational foundation for any given system of values does not imply that one considers all views equal" (p. 37). For postfoundationalists, truth is complex and not so easily gathered up into a solid, impermeable concept as some believe. Truth is defined by the values, politics, and desires of problematics.

From their marginalized positions within patriarchal cultures, feminists have been active in rethinking existing theories of knowledge and its truths. Feminist epistemology (e.g., Alcoff & Potter, 1993) is a dynamic area of study that reflects the broad range of feminist interests and produces epistemological paradigms such as feminist empiricism (Harding, 1991); feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Hartsock, 1983; Rose, 1983; Smith, 1987); situated knowledges, which is associated with standpoint theory

(Haraway, 1988); Afrocentric feminist epistemology (e.g., Collins, 1990); gay and lesbian epistemologies (e.g., Sedgwick, 1990); postcolonial epistemologies (e.g., Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; Spivak, 1987, 1988; Trinh, 1989, 1991); and identity politics (e.g., Alcoff, 1988; Butler, 1992; Collins, 1990; de Lauretis, 1984; Fuss, 1989; hooks, 1990, Wicke, 1992).

Poststructural feminist critiques (e.g., Benhabib, 1995; Braidotti, 1991, 1994; Britzman, 1995; Butler, 1992; Davies, 1993; Flax, 1990a; Fuss, 1989; Grosz, 1995; Hekman, 1990; Lather, 1991; Spivak, 1993; Walkerdine, 1990; Weedon, 1987) destabilize the foundations of liberal feminist projects along with other Enlightenment projects and take issue with the very concept of epistemology since it is enmeshed in a metaphysics that seeks to rise above the level of human activity. As Butler (1992) explains, the "epistemological point of departure in philosophy is inadequate" (p. 8) in a postfoundational world, and poststructural feminist critiques attempt to reframe the problematic of knowledge.

Foucault's explication of the relationship of knowledge, truth, and power and his analytical methods, archaeology and genealogy, have been put to good use by poststructural feminists in their work of identifying the "regimes of truth" that operate to subjugate women and other marginalized groups. Poststructural critiques of knowledge and discourse have allowed feminists to theorize feminism as a "reverse discourse" (Foucault, 1978/1976, p. 101), one that circulates alongside patriarchal discourses and gains legitimacy as it works within and against their assumptions. The understanding that knowledge and truth are not "pure" but unstable and contingent is very attractive to feminists who do the analytical work of documenting how discourses and operations of power have produced certain knowledge and truth about women that have become "natural" and self-evident – that women are weak, irrational, incapable of rigorous scholarship or effective leadership, etc. This commonsense knowledge has not been scientifically discovered but produced for particular reasons from particular positions of power.

The point here is that the knower and the known are in the "same causal scientific plane … all scientific knowledge is always, in every respect, socially situated. Neither knowers nor the knowledge they produce are or could be impartial, disinterested, value-neutral, Archimedean" (Harding, 1991, p. 11). And, as we can never escape the webs of power relations and the grids of regularity produced by discourse and cultural practices, we are obliged to give up on the Enlightenment promise of an innocent knowledge, one that will lead us to the Truth that will set us free. Richardson (1994) explains the limits and possibilities of knowledge and truth claims in a postmodern world as follows:

> The core of postmodernism is the *doubt* that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the "right" or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge. Postmodernism *suspects* all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural, and political struggles. But postmodernism does not automatically reject conventional methods of knowing and telling as false or archaic. Rather, it opens those standard methods to inquiry and introduces new methods, which are also, then, subject to critique. The postmodernist context of doubt distrusts all methods equally. … But a postmodernist position does allow us to know "something" without claiming to know everything. Having a partial, local, historical knowledge is still knowing. (pp. 517–518)

So the feminist poststructural critique of epistemology is one of ongoing questioning, a skepticism about the relation of women to power, truth, and knowledge – a permanent political critique that has no end. This critique has been particularly useful for educators who work to produce different knowledge in different ways and to trouble what counts as truth (e.g., Benhabib, 1990; Butler, 1992; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Gore, 1993; Hekman, 1990; Lather, 1991; McCoy, 1995; Visweswaran, 1994).

The subject

Poststructural critiques require a rethinking of all taken-for-granted, explanatory fictions that humanism has produced. Most importantly, humanism's inscription of the individual, the subject, must give way once the meaning of language, discourse, rationality, power, resistance, freedom, knowledge, and truth has shifted. One of the most powerful constructs of the modern era must be reconsidered.

The individual of humanism is generally understood to be a conscious, stable, unified, rational, coherent, knowing, autonomous, and ahistoric individual who is "endowed with a will, a freedom, an intentionality which is then subsequently 'expressed' in language, in action, in the public domain" (Butler, 1995, p. 136). As Green (1988) explains, humanism requires a subject of knowledge, the "production of an integral identity ahead of words and actions so that the latter are encountered as indexical expressions of the former" (p. 33). This humanist individual has presence, Derrida's bane. "It suggests the certitudes of well-defined, stable, impermeable boundaries around a singular, unified, and atomic core, the unequivocal delineation of inside and outside" (Smith, 1993, p. 5). Because of its separation and distance from the outside, the individual of humanism, following Comte, can study the outside, observe it, know it, make predictions about what the outside will do, and try to control it. The individual can thus produce true knowledge and has the power to effect change. In addition, the self's center, its internal integrity, is elsewhere; it is not part of the outside, of the known, of social practice, of change, of time; it is uncontaminated by the outside, by the Other. As Smith (1993) says, "Unique, unitary, unencumbered, the self escapes all forms of embodiment" (p. 6).

As the centered center of his world, the Cartesian ego founded modern philosophy, and the humanist individual became the origin of truth and knowledge. By defining himself as the all-knowing subject, Descartes defined everything that is not subject as object. By defining his self as identity, he defined everything else as difference: ipseity vs. alterity. This fundamental opposition of self/other, subject/object, and identity/difference – this notion of presence as discussed by Derrida (1974/1967) and Foucault (1972/1969) – sets up the possibility for other oppositions or binaries, and this binary logic is a fundamental statement of the discourse of the classical Western episteme. To elaborate, Ragland-Sullivan (1986) describes this humanist cogito, "the philosophy of the supremacy of mind and consciousness over the whole of the phenomena of human experience" (p. 10) as follows: "the Occidental subject is still a mixture of the medieval 'I' believe; the Cartesian 'I' think; the Romantic 'I' feel; as well as the existential 'I' choose; the Freudian 'I' dream" (p. 10) and the "I" of empirical science.

The humanist self clearly has an inherent agency. "Neither powerless nor passive, it assumes and celebrates agency. Its movement through time/history is purposeful, consistent, coherent, hence teleological" (Smith, 1993, p. 8). It participates in Lyotard's (1984/1979) metanarrative of the "liberation of humanity" (p. ix), since its goal is emancipatory. All people have access to agency and can escape to freedom from

oppression by exercising their innate wills. Man, through careful exercise of his rational intellect and his will, can free mankind from confusion and error, and those who manage to confront and overcome overwhelming odds become heroes and models for the rest of humanity. In progressing toward an inevitable goal of Utopia, Hegel's absolute knowledge, "the subject," Lyotard (1984/1979) explains, "is concrete, or supposedly so, and its epic is the story of its emancipation from everything that prevents it from governing itself" (p. 37). This lengthy description of the humanist self is necessary in order to recognize this individual who, in spite of much deconstructive attention, remains the dominant fiction of Western philosophy.

This construct has taken heavy blows from Marxism (Karl Heinrich Marx, 1818–1883) and psychoanalysis (Sigmund Freud, 1856–1939; Jacques Lacan, 1901–1981), in particular. Marxist ideology, which is centered on the totalizing metanarrative of class and is therefore considered a humanist project, decenters the subject of humanism "by the historical analysis of the relations of production, economic determinations, and the class struggle" (Foucault, 1972/1969, p. 13). The subject of Marxist ideology is not an abstract being who exists apart from social activity but is a product of society who is deeply embedded in social relations. In Marxism, the beliefs, attitudes, and purposes of individuals are not innate but rather are matters that must be explained by a critique of ideology and an examination of the historical moment in which the subject is enmeshed.

The subject of Freud's psychoanalysis, which many believe is another totalizing, humanist discourse since interpretations of phenomena that do not accept its assumptions are dismissed as resistance to its truth, also decenters the subject of humanism by theorizing the unconscious. A subject with an unconscious that is almost always simply unavailable, not present, and uncontrollable, can hardly maintain the kind of coherence, centeredness, rationality, and agency required by humanism. Ricoeur (1970/1965) writes, "it is a wounded Cogito that results from this adventure – a Cogito that posits itself but does not possess itself" (p. 439).

Lacan's (1977/1966) re-reading of Freud decenters the subject even further by theorizing a subject that it is produced and split as it enters language, in effect, a subject that is constituted in language. It is a being "that can only conceptualize itself when it is mirrored back to itself from the position of another's desire" (Mitchell, 1982, p. 5); thus, it can never be a total personality. Lacan further rejects consciousness as an attribute of the subject as follows: "The promotion of consciousness as being essential to the subject in the historical aftereffects of the Cartesian *cogito* is for me the deceptive accentuation of the transparency of the *I* in action at the expense of the opacity of the signifier that determines the *I*" (Lacan, 1977/1966, p. 307). If consciousness cannot create a unified, coherent self, then the unconscious certainly cannot. "For Lacan, the unconscious undermines the subject from any position of certainty, from any relation of knowledge to his or her psychic processes" (Rose, 1982, p. 29). Lacan (1977/1966) argues that the coherent self of humanism is simply a trope for the bewildering complexity of subjectivities that constitute the subject. "The enabling condition of the vast network of connections established by metaphors is, in Lacan's view, a state of loss; he names this state 'desire' and says it must be distinguished from 'need' and 'demand.' Thus, the 'identity' and 'cohesion' of the subject … are effects of signification, absence, and non-rationality" (Zavarzadeh & Morton, 1991, pp. 5–6). For Lacan, the purpose of psychoanalysis is not to reveal a hidden psyche but to understand how the subject was languaged. In this way, psychoanalysis interrupts the rational, unified individual of humanism.[31]

Althusser's subject begins to move in the direction of theories of the subject suggested by poststructuralism. According to Althusser, subjects are constructed as they are recruited by the dominant ideology to be used and inserted into the social economy wherever the state desires. Thus, they uncritically take up the state's ideologies as their own. He calls this operation "*interpellation* or hailing which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'" (Althusser, 1971, p. 174). By answering the hail, the individual is categorized as a subject. In fact, for Althusser (1971), ideology and the interpellation of individuals as subjects are the same thing, and this statement leads to his final proposition in this regard: "*individuals are always-already subjects*" (p. 176), even before they are born, since they are born into ideology.

The constitutive nature of discourse becomes critical for Althusser, and, according to his theory, we take up or resist certain subject positions that are already available in discursive formations operating within cultures and are obliged to work within the confines of those positions. A different kind of agency must thus be theorized since the discursive subject clearly is not free to do whatever it will. Yet agency does not disappear. As has already been discussed, feminists use this concept of positioning to explain how the subject positions available to women not only limit their agency but also enable certain kinds of knowledge and action not possible from other positions.

In explaining this different kind of subject and its subjectivity, Weedon (1987) writes that subjectivity in poststructuralism is "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to her world" (p. 32). Subjectivity is produced socially, through language in relations. Weedon (1987) further explains subjectivity and the subject as follows:

> The individual is both a site for a range of possible forms of subjectivity and, at any particular moment of thought or speech, a subject, subjected to the regime of meaning of a particular discourse and enabled to act accordingly. ... Language and the range of subject positions which it offers always exists [*sic*] in historically specific discourses which inhere in social institutions and practices and can be organized analytically in discursive fields. (pp. 34–35)

This description illustrates poststructuralism's double move in the construction of subjectivity: a subject that exhibits agency as it constructs itself by taking up available discourses and cultural practices and a subject that, at the same time, is subjected, forced into subjectivity by those same discourses and practices.

Clearly, the individual of humanism cannot remain intact in poststructuralism. Deconstructive analyses, such as the grammatology of Derrida, the archaeology and genealogy of Foucault, and the schizoanalysis of Deleuze and Guattari, put the autonomous, present individual of humanism *sous rature* by positing that the subject does not exist ahead of or outside language but is a dynamic, unstable effect of language/discourse and cultural practice. There are no stable referents for the subject, even for the speaking subject, the "I." The presence of the self is in question, since "the present of the subject is not adequate to itself. The agent in its constitution both effaces and discloses it" (Spivak, 1993, p. 284). In fact, any "coherence of identity [has been] imagined in order to disavow and supplement the failure of identity" (Clough, 1992, p. 4).

The subject of poststructuralism, however, is certainly not dead; rather, the category of the subject has been opened up to the possibility of continual reconstruction and reconfiguration. "The critique of the subject is not a negation or repudiation of the

subject, but, rather, a way of interrogating its construction as a pregiven or foundationalist premise" (Butler, 1992, p. 9). In poststructural theories, the subject is considered a construction, and identity is presumed to be created in the ongoing effects of relations and in response to society's codes. In poststructuralism, "all categories are unstable, all experiences are constructed, all reality is imagined, all identities are produced, and all knowledge provokes uncertainties, misrecognitions, ignorances, and silences" (Britzman, 1993, p. 22). Britzman (1993) sees identity variously as "a place of vertigo" (p. 15), "more than the repetition of sameness" (p. 20), "never identical to itself" (p. 22), and "a state of emergency" (p. 24).

According to Foucault's archaeological analysis (where he defines the subject as a function of the statement) and his genealogical analysis (where he begins to define the subject as an effect of practice), power exists within and among discourse and practice, and the subject is subjected to the effects of that power. In this regard, Walkerdine (1990) explains that "inherent in the discursive positionings are different positions of power. Individuals, constituted as subjects and objects within a particular framework, are produced by that process into relations of power. An individual can become powerful or powerless depending on the terms in which her/his subjectivity is constituted" (p. 5).

A significant question in poststructuralism then is who gets to be a subject in a particular discourse, in a particular set of practices? Who is allowed a subject position and who is not? And to ask the other part of that question, who is subjected? "You try and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don't, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said" (Trinh, 1989, p. 80). Categories created by discourse and social practice "function to create and justify social organization and exclusion" (Flax, 1993, p. 96). Though they are regulated and inscribed by discourse and cultural practice, subjects can resist those normalizing inscriptions and their material effects by moving from a discourse where only certain statements can be made to another where different statements are possible.

There is play within discourse and practice, since as Foucault (1972/1969) points out, anything can be said; and as Butler (1990) maintains, subjects can choose not to repeat a practice. Butler (1992) explains that power does not inhere in the subject position itself. "My position is mine to the extent that 'I' – and I do not shirk from the pronoun – replay and resignify the theoretical positions that have constituted me, working the possibilities of their convergence, and trying to take account of the possibilities they systematically exclude" (p. 9). This activity is complex, however, because, as Butler (1992) points out:

> ... the "I" who would select between them is always already constituted by them ... these "positions" are not merely theoretical products, but fully embedded organizing principles of material practices and institutional arrangements, those matrices of power and discourse that produce me as a viable "subject." Indeed, this "I" would not be a thinking, speaking "I" if it were not for the very positions that I oppose, for those positions, the ones that claim that the subject must be given in advance, that discourse is an instrument or reflection of that subject, are already part of what constitutes me (p. 9).

Identity in poststructuralism is thus a "heterogeneous and incomplete process" (Flax, 1993, p. 93), an ongoing activity, an "innovation" (Foucault, quoted in Miller, 1993, p. 336), "our running self-identikit" (Spivak, 1993, p. 4). Any "temporary coherence into seemingly solid characteristics or structures is only one of subjectivity's many

possible expressions. … What felt solid and real may subsequently separate and reform'' (Flax, 1993, p. 94). Subjects are ''incessant fields of recoding that secure identities'' (Spivak, 1993, p. 211) that overlap and sediment and which are, in fact, palimpsests,[32] erased yet partially visible identities still in play.

The agency of the subject in its poststructural multiplicity is up for grabs, continually reconfigured and renamed as is the subject itself. However, agency seems to lie in the subject's ability to decode and recode its identity within discursive formations and cultural practices. Butler (1995) doubts that agency is possible in humanism where it ''always and already knows its transcendental ground, and speaks only and always from that ground. To be so grounded is nearly to be buried: it is to refuse alterity, to reject contestation, to decline that risk of self-transformation perpetually posed by democratic life'' (pp. 131–132). A subject that is given in advance can have no agency, no freedom. ''That the subject is that which must be constituted again and again implies that it is open to formations that are not fully constrained in advance'' (Butler, 1995, p. 135).

If we are ''condemned to meaning'' (Foucault, quoted in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p. 88), and if identity is constructed in the desire to make sense of the world, the desire for meaning (Lacan, 1981/1973; Spivak, 1993), then meaning and identity produce each other in a dynamic manner. In poststructuralism, meaning can be strategically reinterpreted, reworked, and deferred since there is no referent for the subject. In this way, we are complicit in the production of ourselves. We refigure ourselves through ''deidentification'' (Spivak, 1993, p. 6), ''disidentification'' (Butler, 1993, p. 4), and ''negative self-identity'' (Pratt, 1984, p. 46). ''Our lesson is to act in the fractures of identities in struggle'' (Spivak, 1992, p. 803) and in the ''struggle-filled passage from one position to another'' (Felman, 1987, p. 89). Butler (1995) believes agency lies in ''subversive citation'' and explains this notion as follows:

> To be constituted by language is to be produced within a given network of power/discourse which is open to resignification, redeployment, subversive citation from within, and interruption and inadvertent convergences with other such networks. ''Agency'' is to be found precisely at such junctures where discourse is renewed. That an ''I'' is founded through reciting the anonymous linguistic site of the ''I'' (Benveniste) implies that citation is not performed by a subject, but is rather the invocation by which a subject comes into linguistic being. That this is a repeated process, an iterable procedure, is *precisely* the condition of agency within discourse. (p. 135)

Spivak (1992) situates this metaphor of citationality within the pain of deidentification: ''There is none of that confident absolute citation where what is cited is emptied of its own historical texting or weaving. This is a citing that invokes the wound of the cutting from the staged origin'' (p. 795).

The subject is at odds not only with language but with practice. Moving one step further, Butler (1995) asks, ''How is it that we become available to a transformation of who we are, a contestation which compels us to rethink ourselves'' (p. 131)? What makes us open to refiguration? What enables those tiny explosions of the self that refuse to repeat the same ''I?'' Answers seem to emerge not within an essential self, of course, but in relations among a multiplicity of forces, both linguistic and material, as we struggle with desire, politics, and the plethora of codes produced by regulating discourse and practice. Spivak (1993) urges us to break open the codes and argues for an ''agenda of agency [that will] wrench these political signifiers out of their represented field of reference'' (pp. 144–145).

In any event, trying to locate and name agency seems a humanist project rather than a task of the poststructural critique, a variation of the search for origins. The meaning of agency is unknowable and must be deferred, as is the meaning of the subject. Our ability to rest in ambiguity and possibility – in Deleuze's (1988/1986) "un-thought" (p. 97) – is a poststructural practice of freedom as is the critique of the signifiers that limit our imaginations. Spivak (1993) reminds us that "language is not everything. It is only a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries" (p. 180). Language regularly falls apart, is inadequate, and subverts itself, indicating that there is the "always possible menace of a space outside language" (Spivak, 1993, p. 181).

The agency found in the slippage of the fragmented and mobile subject of humanism is very appealing to poststructural feminists who agree with Butler (1992) that feminists must "rework that notion [the subject] outside the terms of an epistemological given" (p. 14). The subject does not exist ahead of any epistemology, but finds epistemologies available both as tools for making sense that it can adopt and as effects of discourse shot through with power relations that it can resist. Since, until the last 30 years or so, the category "woman" has been so locked into humanism's inscription of the world, poststructural feminists are only beginning to accomplish the deconstructive work on the subject, on the concept *woman*, in particular, that poststructuralism enables. Butler (1992) explains that this opening up of the category "woman" does not mean the death of woman, or of feminist politics, but the possibility of differences we have not yet been able to imagine. Butler (1992) writes as follows:

> If feminism presupposes that "women" designates an undesignatable field of differences, one that cannot be totalized or summarized by a descriptive identity category, then the very term becomes a site of permanent openness and resignifiability. I would argue that the rifts among women over the content of the term ought to be safeguarded and prized, indeed, that this constant rifting ought to be affirmed as the ungrounded ground of feminist theory. To deconstruct the subject of feminism is not, then, to censure its usage, but, on the contrary, to release the term into a future of multiple significations … and to give it play as a site where unanticipated meanings might come to bear. … In a sense, what women signify has been taken for granted for too long, and what has been fixed as the 'referent' of the term has been "fixed," normalized, immobilized, paralyzed in positions of subordination. (p. 16)

This play, this possibility for deconstruction and reconstruction of the subject is exactly what is so appealing to poststructural feminists who use poststructural analyses to make intelligible how "women" have been produced within humanism's grids of regularity and normalcy in order to open up and rework that concept. Poststructural feminists in education (e.g., Britzman, 1998; Butler, 1987; Davies, 1993; Flax, 1993; Fuss, 1995; Richardson, 1997; St. Pierre, 1995; Walkerdine, 1990) have found the poststructural subject to be a fertile site for reinscription.

Conclusion

This discussion of how certain concepts once secured by humanism – language, discourse, rationality, power, resistance, freedom, knowledge, truth, and the subject – have been made intelligible, critiqued, and reinscribed by poststructural analyses suggests the seductive nature of this work. Some feminists, those who make the "postmodern turn" (Hassan, 1987), find that, once the foundations of humanism have

been cracked, there is much work to be done for women. Poststructuralism, however, does not dismiss humanism, since as Derrida (1970/1966) explains, "There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to attack metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon " which is alien to this history ; we cannot utter a single destructive proposition which has not already slipped into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to context " (p. 250). The preceding critiques of these concepts, however, illustrate that, even though post-structural feminists are always already working within/against the sea of humanism that envelopes them, they "are freer than they feel " (Foucault, 1988b/1982, p. 10).

Critics of poststructuralism often seem to give it cursory attention and a quick dismissal. Spivak (1993) responds to this practice by saying that she does not think "people who do not have the time to learn should organize the construction of the rest of the world " (p. 187). Those who find discomfort in poststructuralism – its critiques of foundationalism, absolute knowledge, a single truth, power, a transcendent rationality, a subject defined in advance of living, etc. – often ignore how uncomfortable humanism has made many of the rest of us, women in particular. Those on the wrong sides of humanism's binaries may be eager for access to analyses that can shift those power relations.

Poststructural feminism, then, is another manifestation of feminism with its own political agenda. Flax (1990b) reminds us that the "philosophy postmodernists seek to displace is a fiction, chosen (in some sense) as a maximally effective rhetorical device " (p. 195). So humanism, like any other political narrative, must be interrogated for its enabling conditions. The role of poststructural critics is always a political one, that of practicing a "constant 'civil disobedience' within our constituted experience " (Rajchman, 1985, p. 6). Spivak (1993) explains that the role of deconstruction in such a practice is "to question the authority of the investigating subject without paralyzing him, persistently transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility " (p. 201). Haunting such work is the understanding that "what I cannot imagine stands guard over everything that I must/can do, think, live " (Spivak, 1993, p. 22). This work at the limits of intelligibility is exciting ; poststructural work is beguiling in many ways. And, of course, as Sawicki (1991) reminds us, as poststructuralist discourses "become increasingly legitimate," we must be willing to move "beyond them insofar as they become constraining, disabling, or compromising " (p. 7). The poststructural stance of the persistent critique of "what one cannot not want " (Spivak, 1993, p. 46) implies the complexity and difficulty of the work still to be done on behalf of women. Feminism will undoubtedly continue to move out of licensed subversions and into breaks that mutate and proliferate the category *woman*.

Notes

1. The terms *poststructuralism* and *postmodernism* are sometimes used interchangeably; however, there are acknowledged differences in their meaning. Lather (1993) differentiates these two terms as follows : postmodernism "raises issues of chronology, economics (e.g., post-Fordism) and aesthetics whereas poststructural[ism] is used more often in relation to academic theorizing 'after structuralism'" (p. 688). Postmodernism is an American term which refers to "the new stage of multinational, multiconglomerate consumer capitalism, and to all the technologies it has spawned " (Kaplan, 1988, p. 4) as well as to the avant garde in the arts, "the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture" (Jameson, 1988, p. 14). Jameson (1984) sees postmodernism as a "cultural dominant" (p. 56) that began to emerge after World War II with late consumer capitalism. The term *postmodernism* first appeared in architecture, indicating a different way of organizing space and, by extension, a different relationship between space and time.

Poststructuralism is a French term that represents the European avant garde in critical theory (Huyssen, 1990). During the 1960s the political struggles of those marginalized by dominant discourses emerged within and were produced by critical theories of language, knowledge, and the subject as humanism experienced a "legitimation crisis" (Habermas, 1975). Hutcheon (1993) points out that "There is a long history of many such skeptical sieges to positivism and humanism, and today's footsoldiers of theory – Foucault, Derrida, Habermas, Rorty, Baudrillard – follow in the footsteps of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Marx and Freud, to name but a few, in their challenges to the empiricist, rationalist, humanist assumptions of our cultural systems, including those of science" (p. 247). Poststructuralism is thus a continuation of an ongoing skepticism about humanism and its effects.

2. For a discussion of the varieties of feminism, see Rosemarie Tong's book, *Feminist thought: A more comprehensive introduction* (1998), Gaby Weiner's *Feminisms in education* (1994), and Ann Brooks's *Post-feminisms/feminism, cultural theory and cultural forms* (1997).

The following sources might be useful for someone interested in an overview of poststructural and postmodern critiques: Cleo H. Cherryholmes, *Power and criticism: Poststructural investigations in education* (1988); Robert Hollinger, *Postmodernism and the social sciences* (1994); Ray Linn, *A teacher's introduction to postmodernism* (1996); Michael Peters, *Poststructuralism, politics, and education* (1996); Madan Sarup, *An introductory guide to post-structuralism and postmodernism* (1993).

The following is a list of work by scholars, feminists included, who have been named "poststructural" even though they might refuse that category: Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic subjects: Embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory* (1994); Judith Butler, *Gender trouble* (1990); Judith Butler and Joan Scott (Eds.), *Feminists theorize the political*, (1992); Bronwyn Davies, *Shards of glass: Children reading and writing beyond gendered identities* (1993); Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* (1987/1980); Jacques Derrida, *Of grammatology* (1974/1967); Jane Flax, *Thinking fragments: Psychoanalysis, feminism, and postmodernism in the contemporary west* (1990b); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish* (1979/1975) and *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings*, 1972–1977 (1980); Diana Fuss, *Essentially speaking: Feminist, nature and difference* (1989); Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism* (1994); Susan J. Hekman, *Gender and knowledge: Elements of a postmodern feminism* (1990); E. Ann Kaplan (Ed.), *Postmodernism and its discontents: Theories, practices* (1988); Jean-François Lyotard, *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (1984/1979); Angela McRobbie, *Postmodernism and popular culture* (1994); Joseph Natoli & Linda Hutcheon (Eds.), *A postmodern reader* (1993); Linda Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/postmodernism* (1990); Gayatri Spivak, "Preface" to Jacques Derrida's *Of grammatology* (1974) and *Outside in the teaching machine* (1993).

3. Deleuze and Guattari (1987/1980) use the figuration of the rhizome to disrupt the "weariest kind of thought" (p. 5) that roots itself in foundations as trees do. A rhizome is not arborescent like trees; rather, it is like crabgrass that multiplies and spreads and can never be rooted and contained.

4. Homi Bhabha (1994) theorizes the concept of *hybridity* as a "liminal space, in-between the designations of identity… an interstitial passage between fixed identifications [that] opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (p. 4). Bhabha's hybridity is often used in postcolonial work to describe those who belong to multiple cultures and therefore must constantly negotiate their identities as they move among those cultures. This term can be useful for poststructural feminists who are obliged to negotiate the unstable "third space" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37) that functions between contested cultures and theories.

5. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987/1980), *becoming* refuses teleology since it is not a linear progression in time but a dispersion of the distinction between past, present, and future into the simultaneity of *becoming*.

6. For a concise discussion of humanism, see the book *Humanism* (1997) by Tony Davies.

7. For a concise discussion of liberalism, see the book *Liberalism* (1995) by John Gray.

8. Gayatri Spivak (1993) provides the following list of critiques of humanism that have emerged since World War II: "archaeology, genealogy, power/knowledge reading, schizo-analysis, rhizo-analysis, nonsubjective psychoanalysis, affirmative deconstruction, paralogic legitimation" (p. 274). Other critiques, such as queer theory, are being theorized and employed as needs are identified.

9. Gayatri Spivak (1974) explains in her "Preface" to Jacques Derrida's (1974/1967) *Of grammatology* that there are some signifiers, such as truth, that we seem unable to do without. However, if we are to think differently, we must question the received meaning of such signifiers. Thus, we may choose to write *sous rature*, which Spivak (1974) translates "as 'under erasure.' This is to write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible.)" (p. xiv).

10. *Bricoleur* is a term used by Levi-Strauss, and Derrida (1970/1966) explains that a bricoleur is "someone who uses 'the means at hand,' that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous" (p. 255). Feminists have a long history of adapting a variety of theories to suit their political work.

11. The content of the category *woman* has been contested in poststructural feminist theory. See, for example, Denise Riley's book, *Am I that name? Feminism and the category of "women" in history* (1988), and Mary Poovey's article, "Feminism and Deconstruction" (1988).

12. See Susan Hekman's book, *Gender and knowledge*: *Elements of a postmodern feminism* (1990) for a thorough discussion of the problems with these binaries.

13. *Différance* is central to Derrida's theory of deconstruction and combines the sense of the English verbs "to differ" and "to defer." Derrida (1993/1989) explains that *différance* is the "necessary reference to the other, the impossibility for a presence to gather itself in a self-identity or in a substantiality" (p. 223).

14. Robert C. Holub (1992) explains that deconstruction "was conceived primarily as a philosophical project that has ramifications for all texts, including literary texts. All the main French figures associated with it in this country – I am thinking of Derrida, Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy, and Leotard – consider themselves philosophers and are concerned institutionally not with literary studies, but with the place of philosophy in the French educational system. Imported into the United States, however, deconstruction becomes a 'literary theory' in the eyes of most of its American practitioners (p. 172) … One of the results of this reception is that the philosophical roots of deconstruction, which may be found in the critique of the phenomonological tradition, have been largely ignored" (p. 173). Those who dismiss deconstruction often seem to think of it in the narrower sense.

15. Lyotard (1984/1979) identifies what he calls variously "master narratives," "metanarratives," or "grand narratives" (p. 37) that serve as transcendental, totalizing justifications of knowledge projects. Two metanarratives that Lyotard discusses in detail are "the liberation of humanity and that of the speculative unity of all knowledge" (Jameson, 1984, p. ix). Fraser and Nicholson (1988) explain that the problem with a metanarrative is that it "purports to be a privileged discourse capable of situating, characterizing, and evaluating all other discourses, but [is] not itself infected by the historicity and contingency that render first-order discourses potentially distorted and in need of legitimation" (p. 87).

16. The Italian socialist, Antonio Gramsci (1971), uses the term "common sense" to mean the incoherent, "uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world that has become 'common' in any given epoch" (p. 322). Weedon (1987) cautions that common sense "relies on a naive view of language as transparent and true," but that it is "often contradictory and subject to change" (p. 77). She continues, "its power comes from its claim to be natural, obvious and therefore true. It looks to 'human nature' to guarantee its version of reality. It is the medium through which already fixed 'truths' about the world, society and individuals are expressed. These supposed truths are often rhetorically reinforced by expressions such as 'it is well known that,' 'we all know that' and 'everybody knows' which emphasize their obviousness and put social pressure on individuals to accept them" (Weedon, 1987, p. 77). See also Clifford Geertz's (1973) lovely essay, "Common Sense as a Cultural System."

17. Hegemony, a theory developed most fully as a Marxist concept by Gramsci (1971), is the domination of one group over another with the partial consent of the dominated group. Michelle Barrett (1991) explains that "hegemony is best understood as *the organization of consent* – the processes through which subordinated forms of consciousness are constructed without recourse to violence or coercion … he [Gramsci] was interested in the ways in which 'popular' knowledge and culture developed in such a way as to secure the participation of the masses in the project of the ruling bloc" (p. 54).

18. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1983/1972) think of schizophrenia not as a malady or sickness. Rather, "it is a process (that of becoming). A diagnosed 'schizophrenic' is produced when the process ends in an abrupt impasse" (Massumi, 1992, p. 179). Deleuze and Guattari (1983/1972) suggest that schizophrenia is a logical product of advanced capitalism. "The schizophrenic deliberately seeks out the very limit of capitalism: he is its inherent tendency brought to fulfillment, its surplus product, its proletariat, and its exterminating angel. He scrambles all the codes and is the transmitter of the decoded flows of desire" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983/1972, p. 35).

19. Hekman (1990) refers to three feminist texts, in particular, that focus on the linking of the masculine and rationality: Genevieve Lloyd's *The man of reason*: "*Male*" *and* "*female*" *in western philosophy* (1984), Sandra Harding's "Is gender a variable in conceptions of rationality: A survey of issues" (1984), and Carol McMillan's *Women, reason, and nature* (1982) (p. 35).

20. The first wave of the women's movement began in the mid-1800s. Some find it convenient to say it began in 1848 with the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention. This wave is often said to have concluded about 1920, when the Suffrage Bill was passed. The second wave of the women's movement began in the early 1960s, and John F. Kennedy's appointment of the President's Commission on the Status of Women in 1961 is often considered a starting point. In 1963 the Equal Pay Act was passed and Betty Freidan published *The feminism mystique*. In 1964 the Civil Rights Act was passed, in 1966 the National Organization for Women was established, and in 1971 the National Women's Political Conference was held. We are supposedly still experiencing the second wave, though some feminists felt the movement was in abeyance during the Reagen/Bush years. Linda Nicholson (1997) has edited a collection of essays that illustrates the rich variety of feminist work during the second wave, *The second wave*: *A reader in feminist theory*. Third-wave feminism involves at least two elements: first, academic critiques of what some see as the monolithic modernist feminist political theory of the second wave by those in "post" positions and second, critiques produced by feminists under 30 who find the values of second-wave feminists disagreeable or irrelevant. A "post" position does not seem to be required of young third-wave feminists. Some believe the young third wavers have joined the backlash press against the second wave without studying its historical and political significance. A special issue of *Hypatia*, 12 (3), Summer 1997, is devoted to third-wave feminism. In addition, two anthologies of work by young third-wave feminists that are frequently cited are *Listen up*: *Voices from the next feminist generation* (1995),

edited by Barbara Findlen, and *To be real: Telling the truth and changing the face of feminism* (1995), edited by Rebecca Walker.

21. See, in particular, the collection of Foucault's writing on power, *Power/knowledge* (1980); the chapter, "Method," in *History of sexuality: Vol. 1. An introduction* (1978/1976); as well as his discussion of disciplinary power in *Discipline and punish* (1979/1975).

22. Tom Bottomore (1991) says that "praxis," a concept that can be traced to the ancient Greeks, "refers in general to action, activity; and in Marx's sense to the free, universal, creative and self-creative activity through which man creates (makes, produces) and changes (shapes) his historical, human world and himself" (p. 435). This definition of praxis, however, is insufficient for explaining the breach of the boundary between the human and the natural worlds that has been theorized, for example, by Donna Haraway (1991) and that is also represented by chaos and complexity theories and the new reproductive technologies. In addition, Marjorie Levinson (1995) explains that once we recognize that nature is finite – that we might, indeed, exhaust nature – we must rethink the relationship between human and nature. "Lacking an irreducible and as it were, self-perpetuating otherness in nature, structurally guaranteeing the ongoing recognition of the human, our transformative encounters with the physical environment cannot do the subject-making work they once did" (Levinson, 1995, p. 117). Thus, the work, or production, model of praxis that modernity, and Marxism, puts forth, based as it is on a binary opposition between the human and the rest of the world, must be reworked. If the two do not produce each other, what, then is their relationship?

23. For a critique of the humanist description of reality, see, for example, Walter Truett Anderson's *Reality isn't what it used to be: Theatrical politics, ready-to-wear religion, global myths, primitive chic, and other wonders of the postmodern world* (1990), Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman's *The social construction of reality* (1966), and Jonathan Potter's *Representing reality: Discourse, rhetoric and social construction* (1996). One of the most powerful critiques of the "real" is offered by Jean Baudrillard (1993/1983) in his essay, "The precession of simulacra," in Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon's (1993) edited volume, *The postmodern reader*. Here Baudrillard elaborates the notions of "simulacrum," which can be defined, perhaps too simply, as a copy of an original that never existed.

24. Derrida (1974/1967) explores how the metaphysics of presence privileges the hegemony of vision over the other senses. The Enlightenment spawned all sorts of ocular metaphors that are involved with what some believe is an obsession with observation, which, of course, is thought to produce scientific knowledge. Think of common phrases we use such as "looking for the truth," "seeing the point," "viewing it as self-evident," "a lightbulb came on," "being enlightened," etc.

25. Teleology is the study of the ends or purposes of life; the idea that life is goal-directed. This philosophical doctrine assumes that everything has a purpose or design and is constructed so that it can move toward the goal of self-realization.

26. The Hegelian dialectic is often assumed to be the idea that two equally assertable opposing propositions, a thesis and an antithesis, can be resolved on a higher plane by a third proposition, a synthesis. Actually, Hegel's dialectic is more complex than this rather simple formula, since it involves an identity that continues to expand and encompass difference as it moves through alterity. The resolution, identity, is never complete. See Judith Butler's *Subjects of desire: Hegelian re ections in twentieth-century France* (1987) for a discussion.

27. See Vivien Burr's *An introduction to social constructionism* (1995) for a very readable discussion of social constructionism. Bronwyn Davies (1993) explains that a major difference in social constructionism and poststructuralism is that "subjectivity is generally not made problematic in constructionist accounts, and the liberal humanist version of the unitary rational actor is kept intact. … Poststructuralism, in contrast, seeks to understand the processes through which the person is subjected to, and constituted by, structure and discourse" (p. 13).

28. Foucault (1984/1971) explains that an event is "not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked 'other'" (p. 88).

29. For an extended comparison of Derrida and Heidegger's use of the "always already," see Rodolphe Gashé's (1987) introduction to Andrzej Warminski's *Readings in interpretation: Holderlin, Hegel, Heidegger*. Diana Fuss (1989) writes that "the danger (and the usefulness) of 'always already' is that it *implies* essence, it hints at an irreducible core that requires no further investigation. In so doing, it frequently puts a stop to analysis, often at an argument's most critical point" (p. 17).

30. William Spanos (1993) explains that a *problematic*, a term used by Althusser, is "the theoretical framework that determines the questions an inquirer can ask about the object of inquiry *and* the answers at which he/she arrives. Anything outside the problematic is simply not a question for the inquirer" (p. 229). This is a very important poststructural concept, since it means that one must examine a theory or text for what is not said as well as for what is said.

31. Poststructural feminists employ psychoanalytic theories in their work. See, for example, Deborah P. Britzman, *Lost subjects, contested objects: Toward a psychoanalytic inquiry of learning* (1998); Judith Butler, *The psychic life of power* (1997); Jane Flax, *Thinking fragments: Psychoanalysis, feminism, and postmodernism in the contemporary west* (1990b).

32. A palimpsest is the overwriting of one text on another partially erased text. Davies (1993) explains as

follows: "one writing interrupts the other, momentarily overriding, intermingling with the other; the old writing influences the interpretation of the imposed new writing and the new influences the interpretation of the old" (p. 11).

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