

From Technologies of Gender
by Teresa de Lauretis
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THE TECHNOLOGY OF GENDER

In the feminist writings and cultural practices of the 1960s and 1970s, the notion of gender as sexual difference was central to the critique of representation, the rereading of cultural images and narratives, the questioning of theories of subjectivity and textuality, of reading, writing, and spectatorship. The notion of gender as sexual difference has grounded and sustained feminist interventions in the arena of formal and abstract knowledge, in the epistemologies and cognitive fields defined by the social and physical sciences as well as the human sciences or humanities. Concurrent and interdependent with those interventions were the elaboration of specific practices and discourses, and the creation of social spaces (gendered spaces, in the sense of the "women's room," such as CR groups, women's caucuses within the disciplines, Women's Studies, feminist journal or media collectives, and so on) in which sexual difference itself could be affirmed, addressed, analyzed, specified, or verified. But that notion of gender as sexual difference and its derivative notions—women's culture, mothering, feminine writing, femininity, etc.—have now become a limitation, something of a liability to feminist thought.

With its emphasis on the sexual, "sexual difference" is in the first and last instance a difference of women from men, female from male; and even the more abstract notion of "sexual differences" resulting not from biology or socialization but from signification and discursive effects (the emphasis here being less on the sexual than on differences as *différance*), ends up being in the last instance a difference (of woman) from man—or better, the very instance of difference *in* man. To continue to pose the question of gender in either of these terms, once the critique of patriarchy has been fully outlined, keeps feminist thinking bound to the terms of Western patriarchy itself, contained within the frame of a conceptual opposition that is "always already" inscribed in what Fredric Jameson would call "the political unconscious" of dominant cultural discourses and their underlying "master narratives"—be they biological, medical, legal, philosophical, or

literary—and so will tend to reproduce itself, to retextualize itself, as we shall see, even in feminist rewritings of cultural narratives.

The first limit of “sexual difference(s),” then, is that it constrains feminist critical thought within the conceptual frame of a universal sex opposition (woman as the difference from man, both universalized; or woman as difference *tout court*, and hence equally universalized), which makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to articulate the differences of women from Woman, that is to say, the differences among women or, perhaps more exactly, the differences *within women*. For example, the differences among women who wear the veil, women who “wear the mask” (in the words of Paul Laurence Dunbar often quoted by black American women writers), and women who “masquerade” (the word is Joan Riviere’s) cannot be understood as sexual differences.¹ From that point of view, they would not be differences at all, and all women would but render either different embodiments of some archetypal essence of woman, or more or less sophisticated impersonations of a metaphysical-discursive femininity.

A second limitation of the notion of sexual difference(s) is that it tends to recontain or recuperate the radical epistemological potential of feminist thought inside the walls of the master’s house, to borrow Audre Lorde’s metaphor rather than Nietzsche’s “prison-house of language,” for reasons that will presently become apparent. By radical epistemological potential I mean the possibility, already emergent in feminist writings of the 1980s, to conceive of the social subject and of the relations of subjectivity to sociality in another way: a subject constituted in gender, to be sure, though not by sexual difference alone, but rather across languages and cultural representations; a subject en-gendered in the experiencing of race and class, as well as sexual, relations; a subject, therefore, not unified but rather multiple, and not so much divided as contradicted.

In order to begin to specify this other kind of subject and to articulate its relations to a heterogeneous social field, we need a notion of gender that is not so bound up with sexual difference as to be virtually coterminous with it and such that, on the one hand, gender is assumed to derive unproblematically from sexual difference while, on the other, gender can be subsumed in sexual differences as an effect of language, or as pure imaginary—nothing to do with the real. This bind, this mutual containment of gender and sexual difference(s), needs to be unraveled and deconstructed. A starting point may be to think of gender along the lines of Michel Foucault’s theory of sexuality as a “technology of sex” and to propose that gender, too, both as representation and as self-representation, is the product of various social technologies, such as cinema, and of institutionalized discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life.

Like sexuality, we might then say, gender is not a property of bodies or something originally existent in human beings, but “the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations,” in Foucault’s words, by the deployment of “a complex political technology.”² But it must be said first off, and hence the title of this essay, that to think of gender as the product and the process of a number of social technologies, of technological or bio-medical apparatus, is to have already gone beyond Foucault, for his critical understanding of the technology of sex did not take into account its differential solicitation of male and female subjects, and by ignoring the conflicting investments of men and women in the discourses and practices of sexuality, Foucault’s theory, in fact, excludes, though it does not preclude, the consideration of gender.

I will proceed by stating a series of four propositions in decreasing order of self-evidence and subsequently will go back to elaborate on each in more detail.

(1) Gender is (a) representation—which is not to say that it does not have concrete or real implications, both social and subjective, for the material life of individuals. On the contrary,

(2) The representation of gender is its construction—and in the simplest sense it can be said that all of Western Art and high culture is the engraving of the history of that construction.

(3) The construction of gender goes on as busily today as it did in earlier times, say the Victorian era. And it goes on not only where one might expect it to—in the media, the private and public schools, the courts, the family, nuclear or extended or single-parented—in short, in what Louis Althusser has called the “ideological state apparatus.” The construction of gender also goes on, if less obviously, in the academy, in the intellectual community, in avant-garde artistic practices and radical theories, even, and indeed especially, in feminism.

(4) Paradoxically, therefore, the construction of gender is also effected by its deconstruction; that is to say, by any discourse, feminist or otherwise, that would discard it as ideological misrepresentation. For gender, like the real, is not only the effect of representation but also its excess, what remains outside discourse as a potential trauma which can rupture or destabilize, if not contained, any representation.

1.

We look up *gender* in the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* and find that it is primarily a classificatory term. In grammar, it is a

category by which words and grammatical forms are classified according to not only sex or the absence of sex (which is one particular category, called "natural gender" and typical of the English language, for example) but also other characteristics, such as morphological characteristics in what is called "grammatical gender," found in Romance languages, for example. (I recall a paper by Roman Jakobson entitled "The Sex of the Heavenly Bodies" which, after analyzing the gender of the words for sun and moon in a great variety of languages, came to the refreshing conclusion that no pattern could be detected to support the idea of a universal law determining the masculinity or the femininity of either the sun or the moon. Thank heaven for that!)

The second meaning of *gender* given in the dictionary is "classification of sex; sex." This proximity of grammar and sex, interestingly enough, is not there in Romance languages (which, it is commonly believed, are spoken by people rather more romantic than Anglo-Saxons). The Spanish *género*, the Italian *genere*, and the French *genre* do not carry even the connotation of a person's gender; that is conveyed instead by the word for sex. And for this reason, it would seem, the word *genre*, adopted from French to refer to the specific classification of artistic and literary forms (in the first place, painting), is also devoid of any sexual denotation, as is the word *genus*, the Latin etymology of gender, used in English as a classificatory term in biology and logic. An interesting corollary of this linguistic peculiarity of English, i.e., the acceptance of gender which refers to sex, is that the notion of gender I am discussing, and thus the whole tangled question of the relationship of human gender to representation, are totally untranslatable in any Romance language, a sobering thought for anyone who might be still tempted to espouse an internationalist, not to say universal, view of the project of theorizing gender.

Going back to the dictionary, then, we find that the term *gender* is a *representation*; and not only a representation in the sense in which every word, every sign, refers to (represents) its referent, be that an object, a thing, or an animate being. The term *gender* is, actually, the representation of a relation, that of belonging to a class, a group, a category. Gender is the representation of a relation, or, if I may trespass for a moment into my second proposition, gender constructs a relation between one entity and other entities, which are previously constituted as a class, and that relation is one of belonging; thus, gender assigns to one entity, say an individual, a position within a class, and therefore also a position vis-à-vis other pre-constituted classes. (I am using the term *class* advisedly, although here I do not mean *social* class(es), because I want to retain Marx's understanding of class as a group of individuals bound together by social determinants and

interests—including, very pointedly, ideology—which are neither freely chosen nor arbitrarily set.) So gender represents not an individual but a relation, and a social relation; in other words, it represents an individual for a class.

The neuter gender in English, a language that relies on natural gender (we note, in passing, that "nature" is ever-present in our culture, from the very beginning, which is, precisely, language), is assigned to words referring to sexless or asexual entities, objects or individuals marked by the absence of sex. The exceptions to this rule show the popular wisdom of usage: a child is neuter in gender, and its correct possessive modifier is *its*, as I was taught in learning English many years ago, though most people use *his*, and some, quite recently and rarely, and even then inconsistently, use *his or her*. Although a child does have a sex from "nature," it isn't until it becomes (i.e., until it is signified as) a boy or a girl that it acquires a gender.³ What the popular wisdom knows, then, is that gender is not sex, a state of nature, but the representation of each individual in terms of a particular social relation which pre-exists the individual and is predicated on the *conceptual* and rigid (structural) opposition of two biological sexes. This conceptual structure is what feminist social scientists have designated "the sex-gender system."

The cultural conceptions of male and female as two complementary yet mutually exclusive categories into which all human beings are placed constitute within each culture a gender system, a symbolic system or system of meanings, that correlates sex to cultural contents according to social values and hierarchies. Although the meanings vary with each culture, a sex-gender system is always intimately interconnected with political and economic factors in each society.⁴ In this light, the cultural construction of sex into gender and the asymmetry that characterizes all gender systems cross-culturally (though each in its particular ways) are understood as "systematically linked to the organization of social inequality."⁵

The sex-gender system, in short, is both a sociocultural construct and a semiotic apparatus, a system of representation which assigns meaning (identity, value, prestige, location in kinship, status in the social hierarchy, etc.) to individuals within the society. If gender representations are social positions which carry differential meanings, then for someone to be represented and to represent oneself as male or as female implies the assumption of the whole of those meaning effects. Thus, the proposition that the representation of gender is its construction, each term being at once the product and the process of the other, can be restated more accurately: *The construction of gender is both the product and the process of its representation.*

When Althusser wrote that ideology represents "not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they 'live' and which govern their existence, he was also describing, to my mind exactly, the functioning of gender.⁶ But, it will be objected, it is reductive or overly simplistic to equate gender with ideology. Certainly Althusser does not do that, nor does traditional Marxist thought, where gender is a somewhat marginal issue, one limited to "the woman question."⁷ For, like sexuality and subjectivity, gender is located in the private sphere of reproduction, procreation, and the family, rather than in the public, properly social, sphere of the superstructural, where ideology belongs and is determined by the economic forces and relations of production.

And yet, reading on in Althusser, one finds the emphatic statement "*All ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects*" (p. 171). If I substitute *gender* for *ideology*, the statement still works, but with a slight shift of the terms: Gender has the function (which defines it) of constituting concrete individuals as men and women. That shift is precisely where the relation of gender to ideology can be seen, and seen to be an effect of the ideology of gender. The shift from "subjects" to "men and women" marks the conceptual distance between two orders of discourse, the discourse of philosophy or political theory and the discourse of "reality." Gender is granted (and taken for granted) in the latter but excluded from the former.

Although the Althusserian subject of ideology derives more from Lacan's subject (which is an effect of signification, founded on misrecognition) than from the unified class subject of Marxist humanism, it too is ungendered, as neither of these systems considers the possibility—let alone the process of constitution—of a female subject.⁸ Thus, by Althusser's own definition, we are entitled to ask, If gender exists in "reality," if it exists in "the real relations which govern the existence of individuals," but not in philosophy or political theory, what do the latter in fact represent if not "the imaginary relation of individuals to the real relations in which they live"? In other words, Althusser's theory of ideology is itself caught and blind to its own complicity in the ideology of gender. But that is not all: more important, and more to the immediate point of my argument, Althusser's theory, to the extent that a theory can be validated by institutional discourses and acquire power or control over the field of social meaning, can itself function as a techno-logy of gender.

The novelty of Althusser's theses was in his perception that ideology operates not only semi-autonomously from the economic level but also,

fundamentally, by means of its engagement of subjectivity ("The category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology," he writes on p. 171). It is, thus, paradoxical and yet quite evident that the connection between gender and ideology—or the understanding of gender as an instance of ideology—could not be made by him. But the connection has been explored by other Marxist thinkers who are feminists, and better still the other way around, by some feminist thinkers who are also Marxists. Michèle Barrett, for one, argues that not only is ideology a primary site of the construction of gender, but "the ideology of gender . . . has played an important part in the historical construction of the capitalist division of labour and in the reproduction of labour power," and therefore is an accurate demonstration of "the integral connection between ideology and the relations of production."⁹

The context of Barrett's argument (originally made in her 1980 book *Women's Oppression Today*) is the debate elicited in England by "discourse theory" and other post-Althusserian developments in the theory of ideology, and more specifically the critique of ideology promoted by the British feminist journal *m/f* on the basis of notions of representation and difference drawn from Lacan and Derrida. She quotes Parveen Adams's "A Note on the Distinction between Sexual Division and Sexual Difference," where sexual division refers to the two mutually exclusive categories of men and women as given in reality: "In terms of sexual *differences*, on the other hand, what has to be grasped is, precisely, the *production* of differences through systems of representation; the work of representation produces differences that cannot be known in advance."¹⁰

Adams's critique of a feminist (Marxist) theory of ideology that relies on the notion of patriarchy as a given in social reality (in other words, a theory based on the fact of women's oppression by men) is that such a theory is based on an essentialism, whether biological or sociological, which crops up again even in the work of those, such as Juliet Mitchell, who would insist that gender is an effect of representation. "In feminist analyses," Adams maintains, the concept of a feminine subject "relies on a homogeneous oppression of women in a state, reality, given prior to representational practices" (p. 56). By stressing that gender construction is nothing but the effect of a variety of representations and discursive practices which produce sexual differences "not known in advance" (or, in my own paraphrase, gender is nothing but the variable configuration of sexual-discursive positionalities), Adams believes she can avoid "the simplicities of an always already antagonistic relation" between the sexes, which is an obstacle, in her eyes, to both feminist analysis and feminist political practice (p. 57). Barrett's response to this point is one I concur with, especially as regards its implications for feminist politics: "We do not need to talk of sexual division

as 'always already' there; we can explore the historical construction of the categories of masculinity and femininity without being obliged to deny that, historically specific as they are, they nevertheless exist today in systematic and even predictable terms" (Barrett, pp. 70–71).

However, Barrett's conceptual framework does not permit an understanding of the ideology of gender in specifically feminist theoretical terms. In a note added to the 1985 reprinting of her essay, from which I have been quoting, she reiterates her conviction that "ideology is an extremely important site of the construction of gender but that it should be understood as part of a social totality rather than as an autonomous practice or discourse" (p. 83). This notion of "social totality" and the thorny problem of the "relative" autonomy of ideology (in general, and presumably of the ideology of gender in particular) from "the means and forces of production" and/or "the social relations of production" remain quite vague and unresolved in Barrett's argument, which becomes less focused and less engaging as she goes on to discuss the ways in which the ideology of gender is (re)produced in cultural (literary) practice.

Another and potentially more useful way to pose the question of gender ideology is suggested, though not followed through, in Joan Kelly's 1979 essay "The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory." Once we accept the fundamental feminist notion that the personal is political, Kelly argues, it is no longer possible to maintain that there are two spheres of social reality: the private, domestic sphere of the family, sexuality, and affectivity, and the public sphere of work and productivity (which would include all of the forces and most of the relations of production in Barrett's terms). Instead we can envision several interconnected sets of social relations—relations of work, of class, of race, and of sex/gender: "What we see are not two spheres of social reality, but two (or three) sets of social relations. For now, I would call them relations of work and sex (or class and race, and sex/gender)."¹¹ Not only are men and women positioned differently in these relations, but—this is an important point—women are affected differently in different sets.

The "doubled" perspective of contemporary feminist analysis, Kelly continues, is one in which we can see the two orders, the sexual and the economic, operate together: "in any of the historical forms that patriarchal society takes (feudal, capitalist, socialist, etc.), a sex-gender system and a system of productive relations operate simultaneously . . . to reproduce the socioeconomic and male-dominant structures of that particular social order" (p. 61). Within that "doubled" perspective, therefore, it is possible to see quite clearly the working of the ideology of gender: "*woman's place*," i.e., the position assigned to women by our sex/gender system, as she empha-

sizes, "is not a separate sphere or domain of existence but a position within social existence generally" (p. 57). That is another very important point.

For if the sex-gender system (which I prefer to call gender *tout court* in order to retain the ambiguity of the term, which makes it eminently susceptible to the grasp of ideology, as well as deconstruction) is a set of social relations obtaining throughout social existence, then gender is indeed a primary instance of ideology, and obviously not only for women. Furthermore, that is so regardless of whether particular individuals see themselves primarily defined (and oppressed) by gender, as white cultural feminists do, or primarily defined (and oppressed) by race and class relations, as women of color do.¹² The importance of Althusser's formulation of the subjective working of ideology—again, briefly, that ideology needs a subject, a concrete individual or person to work on—appears more clearly now, and more central to the feminist project of theorizing gender as a personal-political force both negative and positive, as I will propose.

To assert that the social representation of gender affects its subjective construction and that, vice versa, the subjective representation of gender—or self-representation—affects its social construction, leaves open a possibility of agency and self-determination at the subjective and even individual level of micropolitical and everyday practices which Althusser himself would clearly disclaim. I, nevertheless, will claim that possibility and postpone discussing it until sections 3 and 4 of this essay. For the moment, going back to proposition 2, which was revised as "The construction of gender is both the product and the process of its representation," I can rewrite it: *The construction of gender is the product and the process of both representation and self-representation.*

But now I must discuss a further problem with Althusser, insofar as a theory of gender is concerned, and that is that in his view, "ideology has no outside." It is a foolproof system whose effect is to erase its own traces completely, so that anyone who is "in ideology," "caught in its web, believes "himself" to be outside and free of it. Nevertheless, there is an outside, a place from where ideology can be seen for what it is—mystification, imaginary relation, wool over one's eyes; and that place is, for Althusser, science, or scientific knowledge. Such is simply not the case for feminism and for what I propose to call, avoiding further equivocations, the subject of feminism.

By the phrase "the subject of feminism" I mean a conception or an understanding of the (female) subject as not only distinct from Woman with the capital letter, the *representation* of an essence inherent in all women (which has been seen as Nature, Mother, Mystery, Evil Incarnate, Object of [Masculine] Desire and Knowledge, Proper Womanhood, Femininity, et

cetera), but also distinct from women, the real, historical beings and social subjects who are defined by the technology of gender and actually engendered in social relations. The subject of feminism I have in mind is one *not* so defined, one whose definition or conception is in progress, in this and other feminist critical texts; and, to insist on this point one more time, the subject of feminism, much like Althusser's subject, is a theoretical construct (a way of conceptualizing, of understanding, of accounting for certain processes, not women). However, unlike Althusser's subject, who, being completely "in" ideology, believes himself to be outside and free of it, the subject that I see emerging from current writings and debates within feminism is one that is at the same time inside *and* outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so, conscious of that twofold pull, of that division, that doubled vision.

My own argument in *Alice Doesn't* was to that effect: the discrepancy, the tension, and the constant slippage between Woman as representation, as the object and the very condition of representation, and, on the other hand, women as historical beings, subjects of "real relations," are motivated and sustained by a logical contradiction in our culture and an irreconcilable one: women are both inside and outside gender, at once within and without representation.¹³ That women continue to become Woman, continue to be caught in gender as Althusser's subject is in ideology, and that we persist in that imaginary relation even as we know, as feminists, that we are not *that*, but we are historical subjects governed by real social relations, which centrally include gender—such is the contradiction that feminist theory must be built on, and its very condition of possibility. Obviously, then, feminism cannot cast itself as science, as a discourse or a reality that is outside of ideology, or outside of gender as an instance of ideology.¹⁴

In fact, the shift in feminist consciousness that has been taking place during this decade may be said to have begun (if a convenient date is needed) with 1981, the year of publication of *This Bridge Called My Back*, the collection of writings by radical women of color edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, which was followed in 1982 by the Feminist Press anthology edited by Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith with the title *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave*.¹⁵ It was these books that first made available to all feminists the feelings, the analyses, and the political positions of feminists of color, and their critiques of white or mainstream feminism. The shift in feminist consciousness that was initially prompted by works such as these is best characterized by the awareness and the effort to work through feminism's complicity with ideology, both ideology in general (including classism or bourgeois liberalism, racism, colonialism, imperialism, and, I would also

add, with some qualifications, humanism) and the ideology of gender in particular—that is to say, heterosexism.

I said complicity, not full adherence, for it is obvious that feminism and a full adherence to the ideology of gender, in male-centered societies, are mutually exclusive. And I would add, further, that the consciousness of our complicity with gender ideology, and the divisions and contradictions attendant upon that, are what must characterize all feminisms today in the United States, no longer just white and middle-class women, who were the first to be forced to examine our relation to institutions, political practice, cultural apparatus, and then to racism, anti-Semitism, hetero-sexism, classism, and so forth; for the consciousness of complicity with the gender ideologies of their particular cultures and subcultures is also emerging in the more recent writings of black women and Latinas, and of those lesbians, of whatever color, who identify themselves as feminists.¹⁶ To what extent this newer or emerging consciousness of complicity acts with or against the consciousness of oppression, is a question central to the understanding of ideology in these postmodern and postcolonial times.

That is why, in spite of the divergences, the political and personal differences, and the pain that surround feminist debates within and across racial, ethnic, and sexual lines, we may be encouraged in the hope that feminism will continue to develop a radical theory and a practice of sociocultural transformation. For that to be, however, the ambiguity of gender must be retained—and that is only seemingly a paradox. We cannot resolve or dispel the uncomfortable condition of being at once inside and outside gender either by desexualizing it (making gender merely a metaphor, a question of *différance*, of purely discursive effects) or by androgynizing it (claiming the same experience of material conditions for both genders in a given class, race, or culture). But I have already anticipated what I shall discuss further on. I have trespassed again, for I have not yet worked through the third proposition, which stated that the construction of gender through its representation goes on today as much as or more than in any other times. I will begin with a very simple, everyday example and then go on to more lofty proofs.

3.

Most of us—those of us who are women; to those who are men this will not apply—probably check the *F* box rather than the *M* box when filling out an application form. It would hardly occur to us to mark *M*. It would be like cheating or, worse, not existing, like erasing ourselves from the world.

(For men to check the *F* box, were they ever tempted to do so, would have quite another set of implications.) For since the very first time we put a check mark on the little square next to the *F* on the form, we have officially entered the sex-gender system, the social relations of gender, and have become en-gendered as women; that is to say, not only do other people consider us females, but from that moment on *we* have been representing ourselves as women. Now, I ask, isn't that the same as saying that the *F* next to the little box, which we marked in filling out the form, has stuck to us like a wet silk dress? Or that while we thought that we were marking the *F* on the form, in fact the *F* was marking itself on us?

This is, of course, the process described by Althusser with the word *interpellation*, the process whereby a social representation is accepted and absorbed by an individual as her (or his) own representation, and so becomes, for that individual, real, even though it is in fact imaginary. However, my example is all too simple. It does not explain how the representation is constructed and how it is then accepted and absorbed. For that purpose we turn, first, to Michel Foucault.

The first volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* has become highly influential, especially his bold thesis that sexuality, commonly thought to be a natural as well as a private, intimate matter, is in fact completely constructed in culture according to the political aims of the society's dominant class. Foucault's analysis begins from a paradox: the prohibitions and regulations pertaining to sexual behaviors, whether spoken by religious, legal, or scientific authorities, far from constraining or repressing sexuality, have on the contrary produced it, and continue to produce it, in the sense in which industrial machinery produces goods or commodities, and in so doing also produces social relations.

Hence the notion of a "technology of sex," which he defines as "a set of techniques for maximizing life" that have been developed and deployed by the bourgeoisie since the end of the eighteenth century in order to ensure its class survival and continued hegemony. Those techniques involved the elaboration of discourses (classification, measurements, evaluation, etc.) about four privileged "figures" or objects of knowledge: the sexualization of children and of the female body, the control of procreation, and the psychiatrization of anomalous sexual behavior as perversion. These discourses, which were implemented through pedagogy, medicine, demography, and economics, were anchored or supported by the institutions of the state, and became especially focused on the family; they served to disseminate and to "implant," in Foucault's suggestive term, those figures and modes of knowledge into each individual, family, and institution. This technology, he remarked, "made sex not only a secular concern but a

concern of the state as well; to be more exact, sex became a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals, to place themselves under surveillance."¹⁷

The sexualization of the female body has indeed been a favorite figure or object of knowledge in the discourses of medical science, religion, art, literature, popular culture, and so on. Since Foucault, several studies have appeared that address the topic, more or less explicitly, in his historical methodological framework;¹⁸ but the connection between woman and sexuality, and the identification of the sexual with the female body, so pervasive in Western culture, had long been a major concern of feminist criticism and of the women's movement quite independently of Foucault, of course. In particular, feminist film criticism had been addressing itself to that issue in a conceptual framework which, though not derived from Foucault, yet was not altogether dissimilar.

For some time before the publication of volume I of *The History of Sexuality* in France (*La volonté de savoir*, 1976), feminist film theorists had been writing on the sexualization of the female star in narrative cinema and analyzing the cinematic techniques (lighting, framing, editing, etc.) and the specific cinematic codes (e.g., the system of the look) that construct woman as image, as the object of the spectator's voyeurist gaze; and they had been developing both an account and a critique of the psycho-social, aesthetic, and philosophical discourses that underlie the representation of the female body as the primary site of sexuality and visual pleasure.¹⁹ The understanding of cinema as a social technology, as a "cinematic apparatus," was developed in film theory contemporaneously with Foucault's work but independently of it; rather, as the word *apparatus* suggests, it was directly influenced by the work of Althusser and Lacan.²⁰ There is little doubt, at any rate, that cinema—the cinematic apparatus—is a technology of gender, as I have argued throughout *Alice Doesn't*, if not in these very words, I hope convincingly.

The theory of the cinematic apparatus is more concerned than Foucault's with answering both parts of the question I started from: not only how the representation of gender is constructed by the given technology, but also how it becomes absorbed subjectively by each individual whom that technology addresses. For the second part of the question, the crucial notion is the concept of spectatorship, which feminist film theory has established as a gendered concept; that is to say, the ways in which each individual spectator is addressed by the film, the ways in which his/her identification is solicited and structured in the single film,²¹ are intimately and intentionally, if not usually explicitly, connected to the spectators' gender. Both in the critical writings and in the practices of women's cinema, the exploration of female

spectatorship is giving us a more subtly articulated analysis of the modalities of film viewing for women and increasingly sophisticated forms of address in filmmaking (as discussed in chapters 7 and 8).

This critical work is producing a knowledge of cinema and of the technology of sex which Foucault's theory could not lead to, on its own terms; for there, sexuality is not understood as gendered, as having a male form and a female form, but is taken to be one and the same for all—and consequently male (further discussion of this point is to be found in chapter 2). I am not speaking of the libido, which Freud said to be only one, and I think he may have been right about that. I am speaking here of sexuality as a construct and a (self-) representation; and that does have both a male form and a female form, although in the patriarchal or male-centered frame of mind, the female form is a projection of the male's, its complementary opposite, its extrapolation—Adam's rib, so to speak. So that, even when it is located in the woman's body (seen, Foucault wrote, "as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality," p. 104), sexuality is perceived as an attribute or a property of the male.

As Lucy Bland states in response to an article on the historical construction of sexuality along Foucauldian lines—an article which not surprisingly omits what she considers "one of the central aspects of the historical construction of sexuality, namely its construction as gender specific"—the various conceptions of sexuality throughout Western history, however diverse among themselves, have been based on "the perennial contrast of 'male' to 'female' sexuality."²² In other words, female sexuality has been invariably defined both in contrast and in relation to the male. The conception of sexuality held by feminists of the first wave, at the turn of the century, was no exception: whether they called for "purity" and opposed all sexual activity for degrading women to the level of men, or whether they called for a free expression of the "natural" function and "spiritual" quality of sex on the part of women, sex meant heterosexual intercourse and primarily penetration. It is only in contemporary feminism that the notions of a different or autonomous sexuality of women and non-male-related sexual identities for women have emerged. But even so, Bland observes, "the displacement of the sexual act as penetration from the centre of the sexual stage remains a task still facing us today" (p. 67).

The polarity 'male'/'female' has been and remains a central theme in nearly all representations of sexuality. Within 'common-sense', male and female sexuality stand as distinct: male sexuality is understood as active, spontaneous, genital, easily aroused by 'objects' and fantasy, while female sexuality is thought of in terms of its relation to male sexuality, as basically expressive and responsive to the male. (p. 57)

Hence the paradox that mars Foucault's theory, as it does other contemporary, radical but male-centered, theories: in order to combat the social technology that produces sexuality and sexual oppression, these theories (and their respective politics) will deny gender. But to deny gender, first of all, is to deny the social relations of gender that constitute and validate the sexual oppression of women; and second, to deny gender is to remain "in ideology," an ideology which (not coincidentally if, of course, not intentionally) is manifestly self-serving to the male-gendered subject.

In their collective book, the authors of *Changing the Subject* discuss the importance and the limits of discourse theory, and develop their own theoretical proposals from a critique as well as an acceptance of the basic premises of poststructuralism and deconstruction.²³ For example, they accept "the post-structuralist displacement of the unitary subject, and the revelation of its constituted and not constitutive character" (p. 204), but maintain that the deconstruction of the unified subject, the bourgeois individual ("the subject-as-agent"), is not sufficient for an accurate understanding of subjectivity. In particular, Wendy Hollway's chapter "Gender difference and the production of subjectivity" postulates that what accounts for the content of gender difference is gender-differentiated meanings and the positions differentially made available to men and women in discourse. Thus, for example, since all discourses on sexuality are gender-differentiated and therefore multiple (there are at the very least two in each specific instance or historical moment), the same practices of (hetero)sexuality are likely to "signify differently for women and men, because they are being read through different discourses" (p. 237).

Hollway's work concerns the study of heterosexual relations as "the primary site where gender difference is re-produced" (p. 228), and is based on the analysis of empirical materials drawn from individual people's accounts of their own heterosexual relationships. Her theoretical project is, "How can we understand gender difference in a way which can account for changes?"

If we do not ask this question the change of paradigm from a biologicistic to a discourse theory of gender difference does not constitute much of an advance. If the concept of discourses is just a replacement for the notion of ideology, then we are left with one of two possibilities. Either the account sees discourses as mechanically repeating themselves, or—and this is the tendency of materialist theory of ideology—changes in ideology follow from changes in material conditions. According to such a use of discourse theory people are the victims of certain systems of ideas which are outside of them. Discourse determinism comes up against the old problem of agency typical of all sorts of social determinisms. (p. 237)

The "gap" in Foucault's theory, as she sees it, consists in his account of historical changes in discourses. "He stresses the mutually constitutive relation between power and knowledge: how each constitutes the other to produce the truths of a particular epoch." Rather than equating power with oppression, Foucault sees it as productive of meanings, values, knowledges, and practices, but inherently neither positive nor negative. However, Hollway remarks, "he still does not account for how people are constituted as a result of certain truths being current rather than others" (p. 237). She then reformulates, and redistributes, Foucault's notion of power by suggesting that power is what motivates (and not necessarily in a conscious or rational manner) individuals' "investments" in discursive positions. If at any one time there are several competing, even contradictory, discourses on sexuality—rather than a single, all-encompassing or monolithic, ideology—then what makes one take up a position in a certain discourse rather than another is an "investment" (this term translates the German *Besetzung*, a word used by Freud and rendered in English as *cathexis*), something between an emotional commitment and a vested interest, in the relative power (satisfaction, reward, payoff) which that position promises (but does not necessarily fulfill).

Hollway's is an interesting attempt to reconceptualize power in such a manner that agency (rather than choice) may be seen to exist for the subject, and especially for those subjects who have been (perceived as) "victims" of social oppression or especially disempowered by the discursive monopoly of power-knowledge. It not only may explain why, for example, women (who are people of one gender) have historically made different investments and thus have taken up different positions in gender and sexual practices and identities (celibacy, monogamy, non-monogamy, frigidity, sexual-role playing, lesbianism, heterosexuality, feminism, anti-feminism, postfeminism, etc.); but it may explain, as well, the fact that "other major dimensions of social difference such as class, race and age intersect with gender to favor or disfavor certain positions" (p. 239), as Hollway suggests. However, her conclusion that "every relation and every practice is a site of potential change as much as it is a site of reproduction" does not say what relation the potential for change in gender relations—if it is a change both in consciousness and in social reality—may bear to the hegemony of discourses.

How do changes in consciousness affect or effect changes in dominant discourses? Or, put another way, whose investments yield more relative power? For example, if we say that certain discourses and practices, even though marginal with regard to institutions, but nonetheless disruptive or oppositional (e.g., women's cinema and health collectives, Women's Studies' and Afro-American Studies' revisions of the literary canon and college

curricula, the developing critique of colonial discourse), do have the power to "implant" new objects and modes of knowledge in individual subjects, does it follow that these oppositional discourses or counter-practices (as Claire Johnston called women's cinema in the early 1970s "counter-cinema") can become dominant or hegemonic? And if so, how? Or need they not become dominant in order for social relations to change? And if not, how will the social relations of gender change? I may restate these questions into one, as follows: If, as Hollway writes, "gender difference is . . . reproduced in day-to-day interactions in heterosexual couples, through the denial of the non-unitary, non-rational, relational character of subjectivity" (p. 252), what will persuade women to invest in other positions, in other sources of power capable of changing gender relations, when they have assumed the current position (of female in the couple), in the first place, because that position afforded them, as women, a certain relative power?

The point I am trying to make, much as I agree with Hollway in most of her argument, and much as I like her effort to redistribute power among most of us, is that to theorize as positive the "relative" power of those oppressed by current social relations necessitates something more radical, or perhaps more drastic, than she seems willing to stake. The problem is compounded by the fact that the investments studied by Hollway are secured and bonded by a heterosexual contract; that is to say, her object of study is the very site in which the social relations of gender and thus gender ideology are re-produced in everyday life. Any changes that may result therein, however they may occur, are likely to be changes in "gender difference," precisely, rather than changes in the social relations of gender: changes, in short, in the direction of more or less "equality" of women *to men*.

Here is, clearly in evidence, the problem in the notion of sexual difference(s), its conservative force limiting and working against the effort to rethink its very representations. I believe that to envision gender (men and women) otherwise, and to (re)construct it in terms other than those dictated by the patriarchal contract, we must walk out of the male-centered frame of reference in which gender and sexuality are (re)produced by the discourse of male sexuality—or, as Luce Irigaray has so well written it, of hom(m)osexuality. This essay would like to be a rough map of the first steps of the way out.

Taking up position in quite another frame of reference, Monique Wittig has stressed the power of discourses to "do violence" to people, a violence which is material and physical, although produced by abstract and scientific discourses as well as the discourses of the mass media.

If the discourse of modern theoretical systems and social science exert[s] a power upon us, it is because it works with concepts which closely touch

us. . . . They function like primitive concepts in a conglomerate of all kinds of disciplines, theories, and current ideas that I will call the straight mind. (See *The Savage Mind* by Claude Lévi-Strauss.) They concern "woman," "man," "sex," "difference," and all of the series of concepts which bear this mark, including such concepts as "history," "culture," and the "real." And although it has been accepted in recent years that there is no such thing as nature, that everything is culture, there remains within that culture a core of nature which resists examination, a relationship excluded from the social in the analysis—a relationship whose characteristic is ineluctability in culture, as well as in nature, and which is the heterosexual relationship. I will call it the obligatory social relationship between "man" and "woman."²⁴

In arguing that the "discourses of heterosexuality oppress us in the sense that they prevent us from speaking unless we speak in their terms" (p. 105), Wittig is recovering the sense of the oppressiveness of power as it is imbricated in institutionally controlled knowledges, a sense which has somehow been lost in placing the emphasis on the Foucauldian view of power as productive, and hence as positive. While it would be difficult to disprove that power is productive of knowledges, meanings, and values, it seems obvious enough that we have to make distinctions between the positive effects and the oppressive effects of such production. And that is not an issue for political practice alone, but, as Wittig forcefully reminds us, it is especially a question to be asked of theory.

I will then rewrite my third proposition: *The construction of gender goes on today through the various technologies of gender (e.g., cinema) and institutional discourses (e.g., theory) with power to control the field of social meaning and thus produce, promote, and "implant" representations of gender. But the terms of a different construction of gender also exist, in the margins of hegemonic discourses. Posed from outside the heterosexual social contract, and inscribed in micropolitical practices, these terms can also have a part in the construction of gender, and their effects are rather at the "local" level of resistances, in subjectivity and self-representation.* I will return to this last point in section 4.

In the last chapter of *Alice Doesn't*, I used the term *experience* to designate the process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. I sought to define experience more precisely as a complex of meaning effects, habits, dispositions, associations, and perceptions resulting from the semiotic interaction of self and outer world (in C.S. Peirce's words). The constellation or configuration of meaning effects which I call experience shifts and is reformed continually, for each subject, with her or his continuous engagement in social reality, a reality that includes—and for women centrally—the social relations of gender. For, as I began to argue in that book, following through the critical insights of Virginia Woolf and Catharine MacKinnon, female subjectivity and experience are necessarily couched in a specific relation to sexuality. And however insufficiently de-

veloped, that observation suggests to me that what I was trying to define with the notion of a complex of habits, associations, perceptions, and dispositions which en-genders one as female—what I was getting at was precisely the experience of gender, the meaning effects and self-representations produced in the subject by the sociocultural practices, discourses, and institutions devoted to the production of women and men. And it was surely not coincidental, then, that my analyses had been concerned with cinema, narrative, and theory. For these themselves, of course, are all technologies of gender.

Now, to assert that theory (a generic term for any theoretical discourse seeking to account for a particular object of knowledge, and in effect constructing that object in a field of meaning as its proper domain of knowledge, the domain being often called "discipline") is a technology of gender may seem paradoxical given the fact I have been lamenting for most of these pages; namely, that the theories that are available to help us map the passage from sociality to subjectivity, from symbolic systems to individual perception, or from cultural representations to self-representation—a passage in discontinuous space, I might say—are either unconcerned with gender or unable to conceive of a female subject.²⁵ They are unconcerned with gender, like Althusser's and Foucault's, or the earlier work of Julia Kristeva or of Umberto Eco; or else, if they do concern themselves with gender, as Freud's theory of psychoanalysis does (more than any other, in fact, with the exception of feminist theory), and if they do then offer a model of the construction of gender in sexual difference, nevertheless their map of the terrain between sociality and subjectivity is one that leaves the female subject hopelessly caught in patriarchal swamps or stranded somewhere between the devil and the deep blue sea. However, and this is my argument in the present book, both kinds of theories, and the fictions they inspire, contain and promote some representation of gender, no less than cinema does.

A case in point is Kaja Silverman's illuminating work on subjectivity and language in psychoanalysis. In arguing that subjectivity is produced through language, and that the human subject is a semiotic and therefore also a gendered subject, Silverman makes a valiant effort, in her words, "to create a space for the female subject within [its] pages, even if that space is only a negative one."²⁶ And indeed, in the Lacanian framework of her analysis, the issue of gender does not fit, and the female subject can be defined only vaguely as a "point of resistance" (p. 144, p. 232) to patriarchal culture, as "potentially subversive" (p. 233), or as structured negatively "in relation to the phallus" (p. 191). This negativity of woman, her lacking or transcending the laws and processes of signification, has a counterpart, in poststructuralist psychoanalytic theory, in the notion of femininity as a

privileged condition, a nearness to nature, the body, the side of the maternal, or the unconscious. However, we are cautioned, this femininity is purely a representation, a positionality within the phallic model of desire and signification; it is not a quality or a property of women. Which all amounts to saying that woman, as subject of desire or of signification, is unrepresentable; or, better, that in the phallic order of patriarchal culture and in its theory, woman is unrepresentable except as representation.

But even when it diverges from the Lacanian version that is predominant in literary criticism and film theory, and when it does pose the question of how one becomes a woman (as does, for instance, object-relations theory, which has appealed to feminists as much as if not more than Lacan or Freud), psychoanalysis defines woman *in relation to* man, from within the same frame of reference and with the analytical categories elaborated to account for the psychosocial development of the male. That is why psychoanalysis does not address, cannot address, the complex and contradictory relation of women to Woman, which it instead defines as a simple equation: women = Woman = Mother. And that, as I have suggested, is one of the most deeply rooted effects of the ideology of gender.

Before I go on to consider the representations of gender that are contained in other current discourses of interest to feminism, I want to return briefly to my own position vis-à-vis the problem of understanding gender both through a critical reading of theory and through the shifting configurations of my experience as a feminist and a theorist. If I could not but see, although I was unable to formulate it in my earlier work, that cinema and narrative theories were technologies of gender,²⁷ it was not only that I had read Foucault and Althusser (they had said nothing about gender) and Woolf and MacKinnon (they had), but also that I had absorbed as my experience (through my own history and engagement in social reality and in the gendered spaces of feminist communities) the analytical and critical method of feminism, the *practice* of self-consciousness. For the understanding of one's personal condition as a woman in terms social and political, and the constant revision, reevaluation, and reconceptualization of that condition in relation to other women's understanding of their sociosexual positions, generate a mode of apprehension of all social reality that derives from the consciousness of gender. And from that apprehension, from that personal, intimate, analytical, and political knowledge of the pervasiveness of gender, there is no going back to the innocence of "biology."

That is why I find it impossible to share some women's belief in a matriarchal past or a contemporary "matristic" realm presided over by the Goddess, a realm of female tradition, marginal and subterranean and yet all positive and good, peace-loving, ecologically correct, matrilineal, matrifocal, non-Indo-European, and so forth; in short, a world untouched by

ideology, class and racial struggle, television—a world untroubled by the contradictory demands and oppressive rewards of gender as I, and surely those women, too, have daily experienced it. On the other hand, and much for the same reasons, I find it equally impossible to dismiss gender either as an essentialist and mythical idea of the kind I have just described, or as the liberal-bourgeois idea encouraged by media advertisers: someday soon, somehow, women will have careers, their own last names and property, children, husbands, and/or female lovers according to preference—and all that without altering the existing social relations and the heterosexual structures to which our society, and most others, are securely screwed.

Even this scenario, which, honestly I must admit, looms often enough in the background of a certain feminist discourse on gender, even this Ideal State of gender equality is not sufficient to deter me from claiming gender as a radical issue for feminist theory. And so I come to the last of the four propositions.

4.

The ideal state of gender equality, as I have just described it, is an easy target for deconstructors. Granted. (Although it is not altogether a straw man, because it is a real representation, as it were: just go to the movies on your next date, and you may see it.) But besides the blatant examples of ideological representation of gender in cinema, where the technology's intentionality is virtually foregrounded on the screen; and besides psychoanalysis, whose medical practice is much more of a technology of gender than its theory, there are other, subtler efforts to contain the trauma of gender—the potential disruption of the social fabric and of white male privilege that could ensue if this feminist critique of gender as ideologico-technological production were to become widespread.

Consider, for one, the new wave of critical writings by men on feminism that have appeared of late. Male philosophers writing as woman, male critics reading as a woman, men on feminism—what is it all about? Clearly it is an *homage* (the pun is too tempting not to save it), but to what end? For the most part in the form of short mentions or occasional papers, these works do not support or valorize within the academy the feminist project per se. What they valorize and legitimate are certain positions within academic feminism, those positions that accommodate either or both the critic's personal interests and male-centered theoretical concerns.²⁸

As the introduction to a recent collection of essays on *Gender and Reading* remarks, there is evidence that men are "resisting readers" of women's fiction. More precisely, "it is not that men can't read women's texts; it is,

rather, that they *won't*."²⁹ As far as theory goes, the evidence is very easy to check by a quick glance through the index of names of any book that does not specifically identify itself as feminist. The poverty of references to both feminist and female critics there is so consistent that one may be tempted, as Elaine Showalter was, to welcome "the move to feminist criticism on the part of [prominent] male theorists."³⁰ And the temptation may be irresistible if, like the editors of *Gender and Reading*, one is concerned "that discussions of *gender difference* do not foreclose the recognition of individual variability and of *the common ground shared by all humans*" (p. xxix; emphasis added).

The limits and the liability of this view of gender as "gender difference" become especially apparent when, in one of the essays of the collection, which proposes "A Theory for Lesbian Readers," Jean Kennard finds herself in agreement with Jonathan Culler (quoting Showalter) and reinscribes his-and-her words directly into her own: "Reading as a lesbian is not necessarily what happens when a lesbian reads. . . . The hypothesis of a *lesbian* reader [is what] changes our apprehension of a given text."³¹ Ironically, or, I should rather say, thanks to poetic justice, this last statement contradicts and runs in the opposite direction of Kennard's own critical project, clearly stated a few pages earlier: "What I wish to suggest here is a theory of reading which will not oversimplify the concept of identification, which will not subsume lesbian difference under a universal female. . . . It is an attempt to suggest a way in which lesbians could reread and write about texts" (p. 66).

The irony is in that Culler's statement—in line with Derridean deconstruction, which is the context of his statement—is intended to make gender synonymous with discursive difference(s), differences that are effects of language or positions in discourse, and thus indeed independent of the reader's gender (this notion of difference was already mentioned à propos of Michèle Barrett's critique of it). What Kennard is suggesting, then, is that Culler can read not only as a woman but also as a lesbian, and that would "subsume lesbian difference" not only "under a universal female" but also under the universal male (which Jonathan Culler himself might not accept to represent, in the name of *différance*). The poetic justice is welcome in that Kennard's critical hunch and initial assumption (that lesbians read differently from committedly heterosexual women as well as men) are quite correct, in my opinion; only, they need to be justified, or rendered justice to, by other means than male theories of reading or Gestalt psychology (for in addition to Lacan and Derrida, via Culler, Kennard draws her theory of "polar reading" from Joseph Zinker's theory of opposing characteristics or "polarities"). For the purposes of the matter at

hand, poetic justice may be impersonated by Tania Modleski's critical assessment of the Showalter-Culler "hypothesis":

For Culler, each stage of feminist criticism renders increasingly problematic the idea of "women's experience." By calling this notion into question, Culler manages to clear a space for male feminist interpretations of literary texts. Thus, at one point he quotes Peggy Kamuf's remark about feminism as a way of reading, and he borrows a term, ironically enough, from Elaine Showalter in order to suggest that "reading as a woman" is ultimately not a matter of any actual reader's gender: over and over again, Culler speaks of the need for the critic to adopt what Showalter has called the "hypothesis" of a woman reader in lieu of appealing to the experience of real readers.³²

Then, showing how Culler accepts Freud's account in *Moses and Monotheism*, and hence speculates that a literary criticism bent on ascertaining the *legitimate* meanings of a text must be seen as "patriarchal," Modleski suggests that Culler is himself patriarchal "just at the point when he seems to be most feminist—when he arrogates to himself and to other male critics the ability to read as women by 'hypothesizing' women readers" (p. 133). A *feminist* criticism, she concludes, should reject "the *hypothesis* of a woman reader" and instead promote the "actual female reader."³³

Paradoxically, as I point out in chapter 2 with regard to Foucault's stance on the issue of rape, some of the more subtle attempts to contain this trauma of gender are inscribed in the theoretical discourses that most explicitly aim to deconstruct the status quo in the Text of Western Culture: antihumanist philosophy and Derridean deconstruction itself, as refashioned in literary and textual studies in the Anglo-American academy. In her analysis of the notion of femininity in contemporary French philosophy, Rosi Braidotti sees that notion as central to its foremost preoccupations: the critique of rationality, the demystification of unified subjectivity (the individual as subject of knowledge), and the investigation of the complicity between knowledge and power. The radical critique of subjectivity, she argues, "has become focused on a number of questions concerning the role and the status of 'femininity' in the conceptual frame of philosophic discourse."³⁴ This interest appears to be "an extraordinary co-occurrence of phenomena: the rebirth of the women's movement, on the one hand, and the need to reexamine the foundations of rational discourse felt by the majority of European philosophers," on the other. Braidotti then goes on to discuss the various forms that femininity assumes in the work of Deleuze, Foucault, Lyotard, and Derrida, and, concurrently, the consistent refusal by each philosopher to identify femininity with real women. On the contrary, it is only by giving up the insistence on sexual specificity (gender) that women, in their eyes, would be the social group best qualified (because they

are oppressed by sexuality) to foster a radically "other" subject, de-centered and de-sexualized.

So it is that, by displacing the question of gender onto an ahistorical, purely textual figure of femininity (Derrida); or by shifting the sexual basis of gender quite beyond sexual difference, onto a body of diffuse pleasures (Foucault) and libidinally invested surfaces (Lyotard), or a body-site of undifferentiated affectivity, and hence a subject freed from (self-)representation and the constraints of identity (Deleuze); and finally by displacing the ideology, but also the reality—the historicity—of gender onto this diffuse, decentered, or deconstructed (but certainly not female) subject—so it is that, paradoxically again, these theories make their appeal to women, naming the process of such displacing with the term *becoming woman* (*devenir-femme*).

In other words, only by denying sexual difference (and gender) as components of subjectivity in real women, and hence by denying the history of women's political oppression and resistance, as well as the epistemological contribution of feminism to the redefinition of subjectivity and sociality, can the philosophers see in "women" the privileged repository of "the future of mankind." That, Braidotti observes, "is nothing but the old mental habit [of philosophers] of thinking the masculine as synonymous with universal . . . the mental habit of translating women into metaphor" (pp. 34–35). That this habit is older, and so harder to break than the Cartesian subject, may account for the predominant disregard, when it is not outright contempt, that male intellectuals have for feminist theorizing, in spite of occasional gestures in the direction of "women's struggles" or the granting of political status to the women's movement. That should not, and does not, prevent feminist theorists from reading, rereading and rewriting their works.

On the contrary, the need for feminist theory to continue its radical critique of dominant discourses on gender, such as these are, even as they attempt to do away with sexual difference altogether, is all the more pressing since the word *postfeminism* has been spoken, and not in vain. This kind of deconstruction of the subject is effectively a way to recontain women in femininity (Woman) and to reposition female subjectivity in the male subject, however that will be defined. Furthermore, it closes the door in the face of the emergent social subject which these discourses are purportedly seeking to address, a subject constituted across a multiplicity of differences in discursive and material heterogeneity. Again, then, I rewrite: *If the deconstruction of gender inevitably effects its (re)construction, the question is, in which terms and in whose interest is the de-re-construction being effected?*

Returning now to the problem I tried to elucidate in discussing Jean

Kennard's essay, the difficulty we find in theorizing the construction of subjectivity in textuality is greatly increased, and the task proportionately more urgent, when the subjectivity in question is en-gendered in a relation to sexuality that is altogether unrepresentable in the terms of hegemonic discourses on sexuality and gender. The problem, which is a problem for all feminist scholars and teachers, is one we face almost daily in our work, namely, that most of the available theories of reading, writing, sexuality, ideology, or any other cultural production are built on male narratives of gender, whether oedipal or anti-oedipal, bound by the heterosexual contract; narratives which persistently tend to re-produce themselves in feminist theories. They *tend to*, and will do so unless one constantly resists, suspicious of their drift. Which is why the critique of all discourses concerning gender, including those produced or promoted as feminist, continues to be as vital a part of feminism as is the ongoing effort to create new spaces of discourse, to rewrite cultural narratives, and to define the terms of another perspective—a view from "elsewhere."

For, if that view is nowhere to be seen, not given in a single text, not recognizable as a representation, it is not that we—feminists, women—have not yet succeeded in producing it. It is, rather, that what we have produced is not recognizable, precisely, as a representation. For that "elsewhere" is not some mythic distant past or some utopian future history: it is the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots, or the space-off, of its representations. I think of it as spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparatus. And it is there that the terms of a different construction of gender can be posed—terms that do have effect and take hold at the level of subjectivity and self-representation: in the micropolitical practices of daily life and daily resistances that afford both agency and sources of power or empowering investments; and in the cultural productions of women, feminists, which inscribe that movement in and out of ideology, that crossing back and forth of the boundaries—and of the limits—of sexual difference(s).

I want to be very clear about this movement back and forth across the boundaries of sexual difference. I do *not* mean a movement from one space to another beyond it, or outside: say, from the space of a representation, the image produced by representation in a discursive or visual field, to the space outside the representation, the space outside discourse, which would then be thought of as "real"; or, as Althusser would say, from the space of ideology to the space of scientific and real knowledge; or again, from the symbolic space constructed by the sex-gender system to a "reality" external to it. For, clearly, no social reality exists for a given society outside of its

particular sex-gender system (the mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories of male and female). What I mean, instead, is a movement from the space represented by/in a representation, by/in a discourse, by/in a sex-gender system, to the space not represented yet implied (unseen) in them.

A while ago I used the expression "space-off," borrowed from film theory: the space not visible in the frame but inferable from what the frame makes visible. In classical and commercial cinema, the space-off is, in fact, erased, or, better, recontained and sealed into the image by the cinematic rules of narrativization (first among them, the shot/reverse-shot system). But avant-garde cinema has shown the space-off to exist concurrently and alongside the represented space, has made it visible by remarking its absence in the frame or in the succession of frames, and has shown it to include not only the camera (the point of articulation and perspective from which the image is constructed) but also the spectator (the point where the image is received, re-constructed, and re-produced in/as subjectivity).

Now, the movement in and out of gender as ideological representation, which I propose characterizes the subject of feminism, is a movement back and forth between the representation of gender (in its male-centered frame of reference) and what that representation leaves out or, more pointedly, makes unrepresentable. It is a movement between the (represented) discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere, of those discourses: those other spaces both discursive and social that exist, since feminist practices have (re)constructed them, in the margins (or "between the lines," or "against the grain") of hegemonic discourses and in the interstices of institutions, in counter-practices and new forms of community. These two kinds of spaces are neither in opposition to one another nor strung along a chain of signification, but they coexist concurrently and in contradiction. The movement between them, therefore, is not that of a dialectic, of integration, of a combinatory, or of *différance*, but is the tension of contradiction, multiplicity, and heteronomy.

If in the master narratives, cinematic and otherwise, the two kinds of spaces are reconciled and integrated, as man recontains woman in his (man)kind, his hom(m)osexuality, nevertheless the cultural productions and micropolitical practices of feminism have shown them to be separate and heteronomous spaces. Thus, to inhabit both kinds of spaces at once is to live the contradiction which, I have suggested, is the condition of feminism here and now: the tension of a twofold pull in contrary directions—the critical negativity of its theory, and the affirmative positivity of its politics—is both the historical condition of existence of feminism and its theoretical condition of possibility. The subject of feminism is en-gendered there. That is to say, elsewhere.

Notes

I wish to thank my students in the History of Consciousness seminar in "Topics in Feminist Theory: Technologies of Gender" for their comments and observations, and my colleague Hayden White for his careful reading of this essay, all of which helped me formulate more clearly some of the issues discussed here.

1. For further discussion of these terms, see Teresa de Lauretis, ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), especially the essays by Sondra O'Neale and Mary Russo.

2. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 127.

3. I need not detail other well-known exceptions in English usage, such as ships' and automobiles' and countries' being feminine. See Dale Spender, *Man Made Language* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), for a very useful survey of the issues raised in Anglo-American feminist sociolinguistic research. On the philosophical issue of gender in language, and especially its subversion in practices of writing by the strategic employ of personal pronouns, see Monique Wittig, "The Mark of Gender," *Feminist Issues* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1985): 3–12.

4. See Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). The term *sex/gender system* was first used by Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes toward a Political Economy of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157–210.

5. Jane F. Collier and Michelle Z. Rosaldo, "Politics and Gender in Simple Societies," in Ortner and Whitehead, *Sexual Meanings*, p. 275. In the same volume, see also Sherry B. Ortner, "Gender and Sexuality in Hierarchical Societies," pp. 359–409.

6. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 165. Subsequent references to this work are included in the text.

7. Cf. *The Woman Question: Selections from the Writings of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, V. I. Lenin, Joseph Stalin* (New York: International Publishers, 1951).

8. A clear exposition of the theoretical context of Althusser's subject in ideology can be found in Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 56–65. In Lacan's theory of the subject, 'the woman' is, of course, a fundamental category, but precisely as 'fantasy' or 'symptom' for the man, as Jacqueline Rose explains: "Woman is constructed as an absolute category (excluded and elevated at one and the same time), a category which seems to guarantee that unity on the side of the man. . . . The problem is that once the notion of 'woman' has been so relentlessly exposed as a fantasy, then any such question [the question of her own *jouissance*] becomes an almost impossible one to pose" (Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose [New York: W. W. Norton, 1982], pp. 47–51). On both Lacan's and Althusser's subjects together, see Stephen Heath, "The Turn of the Subject," *Cine-Tracts*, no. 8 (Summer-Fall 1979): 32–48.

9. Michèle Barrett, "Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender," in *Feminist Criticism and Social Change*, ed. Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt (New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 74.

10. Parveen Adams, "A Note on the Distinction between Sexual Division and Sexual Differences," *m/f*, no. 3 (1979): 52 [quoted in Barrett, p. 67].

11. Joan Kelly, *Women, History, and Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 58. Subsequent references to this work are included in the text.

12. See, for example, Patricia Hill Collins, "The Emerging Theory and Pedagogy of Black Women's Studies," *Feminist Issues* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 3–17; Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981); and Bell Hooks,

- Ain't I a Woman: *Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: Long Haul Press, 1981).
13. Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
14. On the feminist critique of science, Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), states: "A feminist perspective on science confronts us with the task of examining the roots, the dynamics, and consequences of . . . what might be called the 'science-gender system'. It leads us to ask how ideologies of gender and science inform each other in their mutual construction, how the construction functions in our social arrangements, and how it affects men and women, science and nature" (p. 8). Moving from "the woman question" in science to survey the distinct epistemologies that inform the feminist critique of science, Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), raises some crucial theoretical questions regarding the relations "between knowing and being, between epistemology and metaphysics" and the alternatives "to the dominant epistemologies developed to justify science's modes of knowledge-seeking and ways of being in the world" (p. 24). "The feminist criticisms of science," she argues, "have produced an array of conceptual questions that threaten both our cultural identity as a democratic and socially progressive society and our core personal identities as gender-distinct individuals" (pp. 28-29). A further reference is appropriate in this context: Mary Ann Warren, *Gendercide* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985), a study of the developing "technology of sex selection," as reviewed by Shelley Minden in *The Women's Review of Books*, February 1986, pp. 13-14.
15. *This Bridge Called My Back* was originally published by Persephone Press in 1981. It is now available in its second edition, reprinted by Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press (New York, 1983).
16. See, for example, Cheryl Clark, "Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance," and Mirtha Quintanales, "I Paid Very Hard for My Immigrant Ignorance," both in *This Bridge Called My Back*; Cherrie Moraga, "From a Long Line of Vendidas," and Sheila Radford-Hill, "Considering Feminism as a Model for Social Change," both in de Lauretis, *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*; and Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Barbara Smith, *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Long Haul Press, 1984).
17. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 116. The preceding paragraph also appears in another essay in this volume, "The Violence of Rhetoric," written prior to this essay, where I first considered the applicability of Foucault's notion of a technology of sex to the construction of gender. I wrote: "Illuminating as his work is to our understanding of the mechanics of power in social relations, its critical value is limited by his unconcern for what, after him, we might call the 'technology of gender'—the techniques and discursive strategies by which gender is constructed."
18. For example, Mary Poovey, "Scenes of an Indelicate Character": The Medical 'Treatment' of Victorian Women," *Representations*, no. 14 (Spring 1986): 137-68; and Mary Ann Doane, "Clinical Eyes: The Medical Discourse," a chapter in her book *The Desire to Desire: The "Woman's Film" of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).
19. Although more detailed references to feminist work in film may be found in *Alice Doesn't*, I want to mention two fundamental critical texts, both published in 1975 (the year in which Foucault's *Surveiller et Punir* [Discipline and Punish] first appeared in France): Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (August 1975): 6-18; and Stephen Heath, "Narrative Space," now in *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), pp. 19-75.
20. Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath, eds., *The Cinematic Apparatus* (London: Macmillan, 1980).
21. In the single film text, but always by way of the entire apparatus, including cinematic genres, the "film industry," and the whole "history of the cinema-machine," as Stephen Heath has defined it ("The Cinematic Apparatus: Technology as Historical and Cultural Form," in de Lauretis and Heath, *The Cinematic Apparatus*, p. 7).
22. Lucy Bland, "The Domain of the Sexual: A Response," *Screen Education*, no. 39 (Summer 1981): 56. Subsequent references to this work are included in the text.
23. Julian Henriques, Wendy Hollway, Cathy Urwin, Couze Venn, and Valerie Walkerdine, *Changing the Subject: Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity* (London: Methuen, 1984). Subsequent references to this work are included in the text.
24. Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind," *Feminist Issues*, no. 1 (Summer 1980): 106-107. Subsequent references to this work are included in the text.
25. It may also sound paradoxical to assert that theory is a social technology in view of the common belief that theory (and similarly science) is the opposite of technique, empirical know-how, "hands-on" expertise, practical or applied knowledge—in short, all that is associated with the term *technology*. But I trust that everything said so far in the essay absolves me from the burden of again defining what I mean by technology.
26. Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 131. Subsequent references to this work are included in the text.
27. I find that I wrote the following, for example: "Narrative and cinema solicit women's consent and by a surplus of pleasure hope to seduce women into femininity" (*Alice Doesn't*, p. 10).
28. See Elaine Showalter, "Critical Cross-Dressing: Male Feminists and the Woman of the Year," *Raritan* 3, no. 2 (1983): 130-49; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman," in *Displacement: Derrida and After*, ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), pp. 169-95; Mary Russo, "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory," in de Lauretis, *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, pp. 213-229; and Alice Jardine et al., eds., *Men on Feminism* (New York: Methuen, 1987).
29. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart, eds., *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. xviii. This passage in the introduction refers specifically to the essay by Judith Fetterley "Reading about Reading," pp. 147-64. Subsequent references to this volume are included in the text. The programmatic emphasis of that refusal is corroborated by the historical evidence that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar bring to document "the reaction-formation of intensified misogyny with which male [modernist] writers greeted the entrance of women into the literary marketplace" since the end of the nineteenth century, in their essay "Sexual Linguistics: Gender, Language, Sexuality," *New Literary History* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1985): 524.
30. Showalter, "Critical Cross-Dressing," p. 131. However, as Gilbert and Gubar also point out, such a move is not unprecedented or necessarily disinterested. It may well be—and why not?—that the effort of European (male) writers since the Middle Ages to transform the *materna lingua*, or mother tongue (the vernacular), into a cultivated *patrius sermo*, or father speech (in Walter Ong's terms), as a more suitable instrument for art, has been an effort to cure what Gilbert and Gubar call "the male linguistic wound": "Mourning and waking a lost *patrius sermo*, male modernists and postmodernists transform the maternal vernacular into a new morning of patriarchy in which they can wake the old powers of the 'Allfather's Word'" (Gilbert and Gubar, "Sexual Linguistics," pp. 534-35).
31. Jean E. Kennard, "Ourselves behind Ourselves: A Theory for Lesbian Readers," in Flynn and Schweickart, *Gender and Reading*, p. 71. Here Kennard is quoting and adapting (by replacing the word *woman* with the word *lesbian*) from Jonathan

Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 49 and 50; on p. 50, Culler himself is quoting from Showalter.

32. Tania Modleski, "Feminism and the Power of Interpretation: Some Critical Readings," in de Lauretis, *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, p. 132. Subsequent references to this work are included in the text. See also, in the same volume, Nancy K. Miller, "Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing, and the Reader," pp. 102-120.

33. Modleski's "actual female reader" seems to parallel Kennard's "individual lesbian readers." For example, and I quote from her conclusion, Kennard states: "Polar reading, then, is not a theory of lesbian reading, but a method particularly appropriate to lesbian readers" (p. 77). This sentence, however, is also put into question by the author's preoccupation, a few lines above, with satisfying all possible readers: "Polar reading permits the participation of any reader in any text and thus opens up the possibility of enjoying the widest range of literary experience." In the end, this reader remains confused.

34. Rosi Braidotti, "Modelli di dissonanza: donne e/in filosofia," in Patrizia Magli, ed., *Le donne e i segni* (Urbino: Il lavoro editoriale, 1985), p. 25. Although, as I understand, an English version of this paper is available, this and subsequent references included in the text are to the Italian version, in my translation.