

# Telling feminist stories



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**Abstract** This article identifies and analyses the dominant stories that academics tell about the development of Western second wave feminist theory. Through an examination of recent production of interdisciplinary feminist and cultural theory journals, I suggest that despite a rhetorical insistence on multiple feminisms, Western feminist trajectories emerge as startlingly singular. In particular, I am critical of an insistent narrative that sees the development of feminist thought as a relentless march of progress or loss. This dominant approach oversimplifies the complex history of Western feminisms, fixes writers and perspectives within a particular decade, and repeatedly (and erroneously) positions poststructuralist feminists as ‘the first’ to challenge the category ‘woman’ as the subject and object of feminist knowledge. Rather than provide a corrective history of Western feminist theory, the article interrogates the techniques through which this dominant story is secured, despite the fact that we (feminist theorists) know better. My focus, therefore, is on citation patterns, discursive framings and some of their textual, theoretical and political effects. As an alternative, I suggest a realignment of key theorists purported to provide a critical break in feminist theory with their feminist citational traces, to force a concomitant re-imagining of our historical legacy and our place within it.

**keywords** *loss, postmodernism, progress, the seventies, Western feminism*

## Introduction

How does Western feminist theory tell the story of its own recent past? Despite feminist theory’s clear variety, both within and outside ‘the West’, when telling its own recent story a dominant narrative, albeit one with a range of affective or critical inflections, does emerge. That story divides the recent past into clear decades to provide a narrative of relentless progress or loss, proliferation or homogenization. Western feminist theory tells its own story as a developmental narrative, where we move from a preoccupation with unity and sameness, through identity and diversity, and on to

difference and fragmentation. These shifts are broadly conceived of as corresponding to the decades of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s respectively, and to a move from liberal, socialist and radical feminist thought to post-modern gender theory. A shift from the naïve, essentialist seventies, through the black feminist critiques and ‘sex wars’ of the eighties, and into the ‘difference’ nineties and beyond, charts the story as one of *progress* beyond falsely boundaried categories and identities. A shift from the politicized, unified early second wave, through an entry into the academy in the eighties, and thence a fragmentation into multiple feminisms and individual careers, charts the story as one of *loss* of commitment to social and political change.<sup>1</sup> Which theoretical approaches are characterized as belonging to the 2000s is largely dependent on which version of this story one aligns oneself with. When the story is a celebration of difference, we are commonly invited to (re)turn to affect as a source of individual and collective knowledge. When the story is one marked by grief, the contemporary call is instead for a return to the material contexts of women’s lives. Yet, however inflected, the chronology remains the same, the decades overburdened yet curiously flattened, and poststructuralism animated as the key actor in challenging ‘woman’ as the ground for feminist politics and knowledge production.

I take issue with this double story for a number of reasons. Firstly, it oversimplifies different areas of feminist thought and the contests over meaning that characterize feminist debate at all points of its history. In particular, and as I explore further in this article, it either fixes racial and sexual critique of feminism as decade-specific, as a necessary but temporary stage in the movement towards a more generalized notion of difference, or it places the blame for feminist theory’s ills singularly at the house of the already beleaguered feminist academic. Neither tack can be satisfactory, surely. Secondly, within this story, feminist poststructuralist theorists are repeatedly positioned as the first to deconstruct ‘woman’, and as either heroic in surpassing past mistakes, or responsible for the ills of feminism in general. I dispute this characterization of poststructuralism for the simple reason that one of the abiding concerns for the majority of feminist theorists has always been, and remains, such a deconstruction.<sup>2</sup> Thirdly, this story has rightly been critiqued as an Anglo-American trajectory within Western feminist thought, one that forces European or non-Western feminist theorists either to reposition themselves in line with the former’s logic, or to depict themselves as critical or transcendent, but nevertheless as *responsive*.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps, then, this double story needs to be more carefully characterized, not simply as ‘Western’ but as Anglo-American. I wonder, though, if such a move fails to do justice to the story’s pervasiveness. National naming of this kind gives the mistaken impression that the problem is predominantly one of exclusion, that what is needed to correct the story is clear – more non-Western and Continental European discussion and reframing. And this is certainly the case. Yet Continental feminist theory not only differentiates itself from this ‘Anglo-American’ narrative of progress or loss, but also actively, if inadvertently, reconstitutes it. So, for

example, in *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice* (Parati and West, 2002), a volume that challenges the dominance of French and Anglo-US feminist theory in the last three decades, the story of what has gone before is still reiterated as comprising a familiar move from sex to gender, or from essentialism to deconstruction. The (Italian) future may be different, but the (Anglo-American) feminist past remains the same. As Domna Stanton and Rosi Braidotti both warn us, the dominance of this story thus not only stifles the particularities of different trajectories, but also sidelines the multiple differences within both Anglo-American and Continental feminist thought in the process (Stanton, 1985; Braidotti, 1997). Non-Western perspectives are also not absent from the dominant story feminist theory tells about its recent past. In fact, and as I explore below, the absorption of the work of non-Western identified theorists such as Chandra Mohanty (1988), Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1989) and Uma Narayan (1997) into a Western trajectory can easily function as a further indication of that trajectory's advancement. Finally, this story circulates so widely that fixing its origins as Anglo-American never quite captures the transitions and translations across English and non-English speaking feminist contexts that mark its progress. So for now I want to stick with 'Western', aware of the omissions the term at once generates and demonstrates.

The doubled story of Western feminist theory is, of course, not the only story we are told. Innovative and challenging accounts of feminist theory are myriad. But, for my own part, despite the fact that I find my own reading of the recent feminist past at odds with this story, I also find myself repeating its logic in research and teaching contexts. And I have noticed other feminist theorists using this story as a kind of common-sense gloss enabling them to move on to the more pressing concerns of their research. Its repetition alone suggests that it is worthy of more precise attention. My focus is, then, on how this dominant story is secured through our publishing and teaching practices *despite the fact* that we know it obscures the complexities we cherish. Which parts of this story are so consistently reproduced that they are understood to 'speak for themselves' without further elaboration? How is a dominant narrative of a shift from 1970s sameness, through 1980s identity, to 1990s difference within Western English speaking feminist theory textually and rhetorically secured? What discursive and political work does this narrative do, in terms of authenticating a particular feminist school or subject, or privileging a particular intellectual biography or national location? In essence, I am interested in the technology of Western feminist storytelling – its form, function and effects.

I focus on recent interdisciplinary feminist and cultural theory journal articles, rather than textbooks or readers, to explore these questions. While textbooks and readers provide clear evidence of the decade by decade approach to feminist theory I am interested in examining, they are not as helpful for an examination of techniques of citation that secure a history as a *prelude* to the author's own particular insights. Textbooks are less useful for indicating a 'common sense' understanding of the recent feminist past, because they seek to produce that past, rather than transcend it. As a way of reflecting my desire to focus on the technologies of feminist

storytelling, I have cited the publishing arena rather than the individual author in my analysis. This both looks and feels odd, but my aim is to indicate that a journal article is the material result of an author's work, editorial practice and broader disciplinary and institutional conventions. Which aspects of an article are flagged by peer reviewers as in need of more work, which teleologies pass unnoticed and so on are collaborative decisions. In addition, since I am particularly interested in which assertions do not need to be evidenced, which histories are told as a matter of course, I am including passages that reflect that tendency rather than the argument of a given article as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

### Historiographic approaches

My approach to feminist storytelling here, then, is historiographic in that I am concerned with the contested politics of the present over the 'truth of the past'. Historiography is in its broadest sense the name for historical accounts, or theories of history. Combined with the practice of genealogy, it has proven particularly amenable to feminist and queer work seeking to emphasize that all history takes place in the present, as we make and remake stories about the past to enable a particular present to gain legitimacy.<sup>5</sup> Gayatri Spivak cites Hayden White's ironic attack on the historian who searches for the absolute truth 'buried in the archives, hoping to find the "form of the reality" that will serve as the object of representation in the account that they will write "when all the facts are known" and they have finally "got the story straight"' (White, 1978, in Spivak, 1999: 202–3). For Spivak, as for White, wanting to 'get the story straight' is an act of disavowed epistemic violence, which prevents attention to the political investments that motivate the desire to know, and that generate a writer's epistemological and methodological practices.<sup>6</sup> In a feminist context, which stories predominate or are precluded or marginalized is always a question of power and authority.

That there is no single historical truth does not mean that history is simply a matter of individual opinion, that all truths are somehow equal. Wary of the accusation of relativism (an accusation productive of a depth of shame second only to that produced by an accusation of essentialism), feminist historiographers are keen to highlight the ways in which the challenge to a single truth allows for increased rather than decreased political accountability in the present. Queer feminist historiographer Jennifer Terry, for example, builds on Friedrich Nietzsche's critique of historians as 'jaded idlers in the garden of knowledge', suggesting that history is useful to the extent that it makes us aware of the power relations at play in the past and present (Terry, 1999: 25). In her work on the racialization of sexology and homosexuality in *An American Obsession*, Terry pays close attention to how inequalities in the present allow certain stories to flourish and not others, allow certain alliances to be made and not others. A historiographic insistence on the politics of the present in the making of the past more precisely still foregrounds the location of the historian or teller of tales. Spivak emphasizes that 'the past is a past present

– a history that is in some sense a genealogy of the historian. What is marked is the site of desire’ (1999: 207). For Spivak both a dominant and a corrective history are what allow ‘the willed (auto)biography of the West still [to masquerade] as disinterested history, even when the critic presumes to touch its unconscious’ (1999: 208). Such critical historiographic accounts of power, history and authorship allow a different set of questions to be asked about the feminist past. Rather than asking, for example, ‘What really happened in the 1970s?’ I want to ask ‘How does this story about the 1970s come to be told and accepted?’ And following Spivak, ‘Why do I want to tell this story, and in telling it, what kind of subject do I become?’

In line with the feminist and queer historiographic accounts I have been discussing, I am sceptical both of linear accounts of the recent feminist past, and indeed of the importance of correcting that record. Such a statement is rather disingenuous, however, because my very belief in the problematic nature of the story of Western feminism arises from my own recognition of debates within the last three decades that complicate that story. So one reason why I find unsubstantiated claims about the essentialism of feminist writing in the 1970s so aggravating is that they ignore the rich discussions about the relationships among gender, sexuality and race that took place in that decade.<sup>7</sup> And indeed you will find that in this article I both gesture to the complexity of those feminist debates (as in note 7, above), and am hesitant to provide a *corrective bibliography* for that complexity for the historiographic reasons that I have been discussing thus far. To replace one truth with another suggests that the historical problem is simply one of omission, that once the error has been corrected the story will be ‘straight’ in the way that Spivak is critical of, an objective representation untainted by bias. But even if we could fully correct the record, this does not account for the reasons *why* certain issues become part of an accepted story, and others fall by the wayside, or at least not sufficiently to allay my initial frustration at those exclusions. Since I concur with Michel Foucault’s inspirational observation in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that ‘Discourse is not life: its time is not your time’ (1972: 211), suggesting that meaning is always multiple rather than singular though the singular takes precedence, my primary aim is to open up future possibilities rather than dwelling on past omissions.

In that spirit, this article focuses on what is going on in the present when feminist stories about the recent past are being told. What textual, rhetorical, exclusionary, inclusive or diversionary tactics are employed to secure this story and not that one, this present and past and not those ones? Of course, the process is not simply one of mechanical deconstruction. Much feminist work is concerned with the emotional investment needed to sustain feminist work of a range of kinds. In particular, I cannot think of the terms ‘emotion’ and ‘feminist work’ together without thinking of the inspirational work of Audre Lorde in *The Cancer Journals* (1980), and *Sister Outsider* (1984). Lorde’s passion and commitment to living a black lesbian feminist life reminds her readers of their own values and embodiment. For Lorde, it is emotional investment and the community ties

that this produces that allow marginal narratives to be told and to survive. More recently, Lynne Pearce (2004) has indicated the importance of thinking through the way feminist texts work to persuade at the emotional level, echoing my own experience that this is one way in which our own commitments and writing practices are formed. Feminist emotion, then, is central to the feminist stories we tell, and the way that we tell them. Challenges to these stories, from within as well as outside feminism, are frequently experienced and responded to at an emotional level, and as a result an account of ways of telling feminist stories needs to be attentive to the affective as well as technical ways in which our stories about the recent feminist past work. It hurts because it matters, when we are passionately invested in academic feminist practice.

### The role of the seventies<sup>8</sup>

Of the recent decades we tell stories about in the Western feminist present, the 1970s emerges as the least diverse. In this section I begin to explore the specific weight that the feminist seventies carries in the service of the governing feminist story I sketched in my introduction. The dominant and most familiar attribution to the feminist seventies is of course essentialism, an accusation so frequently repeated, that it can actually stand as justification for not reading texts from the feminist seventies at all any more. This in itself should make us suspicious, of course, given the political and intellectual vibrancy of this era. Weaned on feminist theories of the 1990s, I was long convinced of the essentialist ills of early second wave Western feminist texts, many of which I did not read until a decade later. When I did, I remember being shocked by the diversity of published feminist materials from the 1970s, and in particular the depth and range of debate on issues of race, sexuality and class in the journals and newsletters of the period. It was this 'shock' that precipitated my early interest in the telling of feminist stories.<sup>9</sup> My interest here is not whether seventies feminist theory is or is not essentialist, but the means by which our contemporary expectation that it is *necessarily essentialist* is secured. How is such a seamless decade of essentialism produced and maintained? What form is this essentialism assumed to take, what evidence is given for it, and how is it mobilized in the service of a broader narrative of progress or decline? My object of analysis here is journal articles, for the reasons discussed in the introduction, but even a cursory analysis of feminist theory textbooks or readers suggests that there is interesting work to be done in this arena too, particularly concerning their dominant presentation of feminist thought as a process of displacement over contest.<sup>10</sup>

The most obvious way in which feminist seventies' essentialism is (re)produced is through unfavourable comparison with poststructuralist feminist theorists. The following example is typical: 'A particular challenge which faces poststructuralist feminism is how to undo the essential or "natural" conception of the self, while simultaneously maintaining the category "women" which feminism necessarily requires' (*Theory, Culture & Society*, 1997).<sup>11</sup> The writers and editorial reviewers of this passage do

not need to evidence the assumption that there *is* an essential conception of the self that it is poststructuralist feminism's 'particular challenge' to undo, because this sentiment is so often repeated without further comment, and therefore the momentum it results in is already familiar to the reader. While the category 'women' that poststructuralist feminism maintains in this extract is in scare quotes, mirroring the 'natural' conception of the self that precedes it and marking both as problematic, the plurality of the latter term stands in contrast to the singularity of the former, which is also underlined by its qualifying and matching term 'essential'. The familiar repetition of this chronology means that the failure to account for women's differences prior to poststructuralist feminist intervention is itself naturalized as representative of the dominant trend rather than a position held by an individual theorist. The 'natural' of the above extract shifts to mean 'understandable' in this reading. Interestingly, feminism pre-difference can thus be marked as innocent of its inevitable exclusions. Innocence is key to a contemporary feminist dynamic, since marking a past feminist essentialism as unaware of its exclusions allows contemporary theorists to lament the fragmentation of a previously unified women's movement in ways that would not otherwise make sense. We can long for a lost unity of experience and purpose (now), because we did not understand its effects (then). Nostalgia smoothes away the rough edges of this particular history; an innocent essentialism can be seamlessly integrated into a feminist progress narrative, recuperated as loss.<sup>12</sup>

The feminist story in which essentialism is critiqued and moved away from is secured through the weaving in of a range of additional binaries, achieving an overall move from sameness to difference. Sameness and difference are in value-laden opposition on the one hand, but are also sequentially tied, as we move forward from (exclusionary) sameness to (inclusive) difference. I find it helpful to denote this as sameness–difference, where the dash I use here and throughout indicates both a temporal and a hierarchical separation.

Empirical studies conducted from a range of theoretical perspectives (radical, socialist and liberal feminist) have all in some way affirmed the existence of women's experience as a source of privileged understandings, if not the basis of an alternative social science. Now, however, the deconstruction of 'women' is having profoundly destabilising effects upon feminist theorising and research . . . This has liberated a plethora of exciting philosophical, political and cultural endeavours that tackle the essentialism around women embedded in both feminist and non-feminist texts. (*Gender, Place and Culture*, 1994)<sup>13</sup>

In this extract the standpoint theory and empirical inquiry (of the past) are contrasted with the deconstructive tools and 'philosophical, political and cultural endeavours' (of the now). Where women's experience was both object and source of feminist knowledge, critiquing the category 'women' means that it is now the essentialism inherent in that (earlier) inquiry that becomes the new object to be 'tackled'. The binaries that this description produces and relies upon are empiricism–deconstruction, experience–text, and knowledge–critique, where the first term in each case is

associated with a trenchant affirmation of women, and the second with an exciting destabilization of the same. The privileged singular gives way to a liberated plethora, in object and narrative terms. The feminist progress narrative represented here is an opening up or branching out of meaning rather than a closing down of the same, so that (sexual) difference as static object is displaced by poststructuralist methodology itself as *generating* (unspecified) difference. No prizes for guessing which feminist mode of inquiry we are called to identify with.

### Establishing temporality

But how do we know that these juxtapositions of now and then, deconstructionist versus essentialist, place the 'then' in the seventies? As suggested earlier, work from the feminist seventies is rarely directly cited but instead implicated by juxtaposition. In order for the 'then' of the familiar story I have been tracing to belong firmly in the contemporary feminist imaginary to the seventies, the role of the eighties is key.<sup>14</sup> Two sets of approaches that become associated with the overburdened eighties in order to facilitate the move from the entrenched then to the expansive now are black feminism and writing on the 'sex wars'. In the case of black feminism, establishing its critique as an eighties phenomenon allows post-structuralism to become the taker-upper of difference in the nineties. If the eighties signifies a growing awareness of racial differences within feminism, the nineties signifies the explosion of difference *in general* (the 'plethora' of the previous extract).

This trajectory fixes a before and after racial awareness, then, retrospectively coding the essentialism of the seventies first and foremost as one of racial exclusion. The following extract provides the typical chronology:

Perhaps the most important legacy of 1980s feminism is the crucial concern with difference . . . Initiated by feminists of color who called attention to their exclusion and/or misrepresentation by mainstream feminist accounts of 'women,' the focus on women's differences was underwritten as well by post-structuralist feminism. Both critiques have produced the most recent object of feminist theoretical inquiry: the female subject who inhabits diverse cultural locations and for whom gender is dynamically engaged with numerous other social categories and discourses. (*Feminist Studies*, 2001)<sup>15</sup>

A combined move, initiated by black feminists, endorsed by poststructuralist feminists, shifts attention to a different subject, one 'who inhabits diverse cultural locations', and who is 'the most recent object of feminist theoretical inquiry'. Often irrespective of its object of critique, black feminism thus becomes a trope in the service of the idea of a progressive incorporation of difference, such that an implied seventies feminism comes to carry the burden of a racial critique that does not need to be explicit to be thus marked. The shame at being discovered to be essentialist is thus unbearable for those of us who cut our academic teeth on post-structuralism, precisely because it gestures towards yet simultaneously obscures an accusation of racism.



While much black feminist writing is indeed directly critical of white feminist writing that does not attend to the complex dynamics of raced and classed en-gendering, what I want to argue is that its citational containment in the 1980s, and invocation as heralding an increased sophistication in the theorization of political subjects, marks the work of racial critique of feminism as over and thus as able to be assumed or gestured to rather than evidenced in work after that point. As Jackie Stacey once again points out, making a trope of black feminism means that it is frequently spoken and written of as a ‘unified [category] in need of no further differentiation’ (1993: 57). In the previous extract, feminists of color ‘initiated’ the feminist theoretical concern with difference, a concern presented as a baton passed to poststructuralists (who are presumed different writing subjects). The sequencing of the following extract similarly works to produce poststructuralism as having incorporated but also importantly having surpassed black feminism:

Two related intellectual debates provided the impetus for critical reflection on ‘the subject’ of feminist thinking. First, women of color and Third World women feminists critiqued ‘the subject’ implicit within most feminist thought at the time, a subject that normalized the experience of white, middle-class, first-world women (hooks, 1984; Trinh, 1989). This critique stimulated greater interest in the multiplicity of oppression and fractured the notion of ‘woman’ and her experience(s). Second, a growing interest in post-structural psychoanalytical perspectives (e.g. those of Lacan and Derrida), as well as Foucault’s notion of power/discourse, also profoundly affected feminist theory. Feminists appreciated post-structural attempts to deploy an anti-essentialist world-view, reject totalizing ‘grand’ theory, and embrace multiplicity, difference and the ‘de-centred’ subject (Sarup, 1988). (*Gender, Place and Culture*, 1999)

While black feminism and poststructuralism are on one level represented here as of the same era (all citations are from the 1980s) and as having related concerns, the temporality I am tracing here is reinforced by black feminism’s location in the extract once again as catalyst – providing impetus and simulating interest. The critiques of women of colour and Third World feminists are referred to in the past tense, while the ‘growing interest’ in poststructuralism is linguistically still active and present, allowing its proponents to ‘deploy’, ‘reject’ and ‘embrace’. Poststructuralism thus imaginatively spills over into the next decade, while the critiques of women of colour and Third World women are temporally fixed by their frames of citation.

As much as it is the era of black feminism, the eighties is also understood as the decade of debates about sexuality, where feminism is forced to move on from its sexually essentialist past:

From the feminist ‘sex wars’ of the 1980s to the queer theory and politics of the 1990s, debates about the politics of sexuality have been at the forefront of contemporary theoretical, social, and political demands . . . [P]ro-sex feminists argued . . . that radical feminism’s representation of women as disempowered actors fails to see women as sexual subjects in their own right . . . While radical feminists see ‘female sexuality’ as repressed by ‘the patriarchy,’ the pro-sexuality movement sees repression as produced by heterosexism and ‘sex-negativity’ –

cultural operations often seen as institutionalized in feminism itself. (*Feminist Review*, 2000)<sup>16</sup>

Radical feminism, clearly taking place here in the seventies, is imagined in wholly negative terms. By framing sexual politics in terms of pro-sex demands, radical feminist analyses of sexuality can be reduced to their focus on repression, and indeed be discounted as sexual politics at all. This historical and political separation is linguistically reinforced through a series of refusals: thus radical feminist representation ‘*fails* to see women as sexual subjects’, and understands sexuality only as ‘repressed’. In addition, what are perceived to be the key theoretical terms of seventies radical feminism – ‘female sexuality’, ‘patriarchy’, and ‘sex-negativity’ – are placed in scare quotes, while pro-sex accounts of heterosexism remain unqualified. Oddly absent from the above account is any mention of lesbian feminism, perhaps resonant only in the term ‘female sexuality’, then to be erased by an immediate insistence on feminism’s heterosexism. Lesbian feminism is also absent from the pro-sex demands of the eighties and nineties here, represented instead by a rather general pro-sexuality movement, whose focus is heterosexism but whose subjects remain unspecified. What does remain is an undoubtedly anachronistic ‘female sexuality’, replaced by the sexual as well as textual play of the nineties.<sup>17</sup>

Other accounts are as explicit in their foregrounding of sexuality as key to feminism’s linear diversification.

Whereas the earlier generation of feminist scholars challenged patriarchal ideologies that reduced women’s prime contribution to society to their ‘biological capacity’ for nurturing and reproducing, the new gender theorists are fundamentally concerned with the historical subjectivity of sexed individuals and the embodiment of sexual identity, seen as indeterminate, ambiguous, multiple (Morris, 1995). For Judith Butler (1990, 1993), who argues that sexual identity is lived as a highly regulated performance, one is not female; one can only ‘do’ female. (*Theory, Culture & Society*, 1998)

Juxtaposing challenges of ‘the earlier generation of feminist scholars’ with the ‘historical’ concerns of ‘the new gender theorists’ consolidates the sense of the former as ahistorical or transhistorical, universalizing, and privileging of a female subject. A further relation feminism–gender studies emerges to regulate the difference. The lack of citation underscores this comparison; the earlier generation is generalizable as well as generalizing, while Morris and Butler can and should be distinguished from one another, and later work from earlier work. The citation techniques here consolidate a trajectory and momentum that does not need to have all its parts detailed. The seventies *in general* is invoked through its comparison to the eighties or nineties *in particular*.

Citation is a central technique in consolidating the trajectory that I am tracing here, and the move is consistently from a relative lack of citation, through to a precise and limited choice of authors. Judith Butler, Donna Haraway and Gayatri Spivak, in particular, are invoked as threshold figures, heralding the dawn of a new feminist era of difference, and representing in themselves the increased sophistication understood to attend

that era. Butler, the most cited of all, carries the heaviest teleological burden, frequently single-handedly inaugurating a move away from 'woman' as the invariant ground and subject of oppression, knowledge and resistance. This extract puts the case succinctly: 'Perhaps more than any other feminist theorist, she [Butler] has systematically elaborated a way of understanding gender identity as deeply entrenched but not immutable and has thereby pushed feminist theory beyond the polarities of the essentialist debate' (*Theory, Culture & Society*, 1999). Citation of Haraway tends to occur in accounts charting the move away from essentialist conceptions of the body, and specifically away from a sexually differentiated understanding of the body within feminism. And citation of Spivak seems by turns to mark a black feminist critique of feminism's white presumption, and an account of that difference as postcolonial rather than biological.<sup>18</sup> Their citation thus seems to signal 'the death' of one way of thinking and the inception of a newer, more flexible way of thinking; it never evidences ongoing contests within feminism over precisely these issues. And as the quotation above suggests, this transition is understood to be one that feminism pre-difference is forced or pushed into rather than one that it is already engaged in.

Of particular interest to me here is how attributing such a shift to difference to a few named authors detaches those authors from their own feminist trajectories. If Butler, Haraway and Spivak are 'responsible' for feminism's reluctant acknowledgment of the epistemological problematics of 'woman', they are grammatically as well as temporally posed as distinct from that history which they have now allowed us to surpass. Citation is once again a key way that a narrative separating poststructuralism from feminism is underwritten. The influences on Butler, Spivak and Haraway are consistently cited as male theorists, affirming the sense of a break in feminist inquiry. For example, in the paper the following extract is taken from, Derrida is the *only* referenced source of inspiration for Haraway's (1985) cyborg figure: 'Haraway must acknowledge a sibblingship with Derrida over those central questions of humanism concerning origin, authenticity and universality. The project for both is to dissolve categorical distinctions, which Haraway pursues most particularly by challenging the concept of the natural' (*Body & Society*, 1996).<sup>19</sup> And despite her engagement with a range of Third World and postcolonial feminist writers, one could be forgiven for thinking that Spivak had only ever read Marx and Derrida from the persistence of such casual introductory phrases such as 'To certify the Derridean assumptions upon which thinkers like Spivak draw . . .' (*Critical Inquiry*, 1998).<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Foucault, Lacan and Derrida are more consistently seen as Butler's primary influences than Irigaray and Wittig, despite *Gender Trouble's* substantial engagement with these feminist authors. Repeated statements such as 'Judith Butler transformed the study of gender by using Foucault to apply poststructuralist conceptions of the subject to it' (*Australian Feminist Studies*, 2003),<sup>21</sup> and 'because of the influence of Foucault and Derrida, recondite abstractions characterize postmodernist feminist theory in general and Butler's books in particular' (*Critical Inquiry*, 1998), allow Butler to be critically reviewed

as marking a break with rather than as having an ongoing engagement with feminist theory.

To recap then: the familiar story is thus. The feminist seventies is ignorant or innocent of racial and sexual diversity at best, or indeed actively exclusionary through its whiteness and heterosexism. The post-structuralist nineties emerges on the other side of the eighties as champion of multiplicity and difference, although significantly an indeterminate rather than located difference – *difference in general*. The teleology could not be more firmly solidified than in the following: ‘By the eighties, changes were taking place that laid the groundwork for the third phase of feminist criticism, which I will call the engendering of differences’ (*Critical Inquiry*, 1998). The seventies and the nineties loom large in such a statement, despite frequently not being directly mentioned. In order for this teleology to be maintained a number of other binaries are overlaid onto this linear trajectory as I have shown (sexual difference–gender theory, singularity–multiplicity, empiricism–deconstruction, and feminism–post-structuralism), and different perspectives within the feminist seventies’ literature squashed, erased, or deemed exceptions to the rule.

Let me be as clear as possible. In order for poststructuralism to emerge both as beyond particularized difference and as inclusive of those differences, this narrative actively requires the misrepresentation of interventions within feminism as decade-specific. A universalized essentialist feminism is directly or indirectly associated with the seventies, and racial and sexual critiques contained in the eighties in order for poststructuralism to have finally both surpassed the essentialisms and incorporated the identities associated with sexual difference, sexuality and race.

## Counter narratives

If the above represents the progress narrative, what of the narrative of *loss* I also indicated at the outset. There are two main forms of counter narrative, both of which take issue with the value attributed to the successive eras, but which leave its teleology otherwise intact. The first is a straightforward reverse narrative, which produces an identical linearity but which reframes the past as marked by a politicized unity, and the present by apolitical individualism. This counter narrative is marked predominantly by nostalgia.<sup>22</sup> The second is a more circular narrative of ‘return’ that similarly positions poststructuralism as problematically self-referential, desiring instead to ‘move forward’ to an era that revalues the imagined past. This second counter narrative is marked by pragmatism or frustration, and is often produced by writers previously favouring a progress narrative.<sup>23</sup>

Firstly, accounts which represent the seventies as innocent and therefore ‘good’, like those which produce the seventies as essentialist and therefore ‘bad’, may seem to challenge a dominant vision of feminist development, but are actually vital for the reproduction of one of its core mechanisms. As suggested above, a singular innocence is to some extent

already written into the linear trajectory that moves from universality to particularity, actively encouraging nostalgia and allowing for a counter-valuation.

'Then and there,' back in the 1970s, we saw ourselves, as many other feminists did, as 'producers of feminist theory' which then informed and was changed by our practice as feminists; and we entered the academy . . . 'to know and therefore to change the world.' Over the period that has led to 'now and here,' it has been interesting to observe the gradual assimilation of academic feminism, and the entry into it of successive cohorts who 'came to feminism' through the text rather than through political practice. One of the results of the passing of time and the perhaps necessary correlates of assimilation has been the rise of a distinct category of 'feminist theory' and a distinctive professional category of 'feminist theorists.' What has supported this is a gradually decreasing awareness of the earlier feminist critique of theory as 'ideas' produced through material practices cross-cut by the operations of power. (*Feminist Theory*, 2000)<sup>24</sup>

In this settling of scores, the narrative structure of second wave feminist history remains unchanged. The seventies is equally uniform, and the eighties equally implicitly framed by two opposite poles leading not to a celebration of multiplicity but to a depoliticized present. In the reverse narrative the eighties needs either to be erased (euphemistically referred to as the 'passing of time' in the above extract), or marked as the last valid moment of feminist political life before the institutionalization of feminism. In the quotation above the use of the term 'assimilation' in relation to 'the passing of time' implicates the nineties and its feminist theorists with the co-optation of its concerns while avoiding the problem of naming. Similar binaries – practice–theory, activist–professional, world–text – ground the story, but this time the first term is imbued with integrity and the latter with opportunism. Through this series of oppositions it is 'feminist professionals' of the 'now and here' who bear primary responsibility for the demise of feminist activism, where before it was a generalized seventies feminism that was responsible for feminism's exclusions.<sup>25</sup> Yet feminism proper needs first to be established as regrettably but absolutely over, as belonging to the 'then and there' not the 'now and here' in order for her careerist sister to take centre stage in the contemporary imagination.<sup>26</sup>

Even where the past is understood as imagined, the subjects of those imagined eras are still the same. In this next example, the seventies functions similarly as an indicator of feminism's pre-institutional naïvety, thereby facilitating the construction of the present in terms of regrettable sophistication.

Universities have clearly offered opportunities to many students of Women's Studies and provided careers for academic feminists. They have also afforded spaces in which ever more sophisticated feminist thinking can be produced. But there has been a price to pay in terms of depoliticization and exclusion . . . Issues are no longer as clear as they were once imagined to be and feminist work may have a tendency to become inward-looking . . . Critiques of essentialism have brought contradictory possibilities. On the one hand, there have been positive gains from the recognition of difference whilst, on the other, loss of the imagined community of 'sisterhood' has led to fragmentation and disrupted political

cohesion . . . We are left with the question of what new kinds of alliance might be possible in a post-unitary feminist landscape. (*Feminist Review*, 1999)

While this extract demonstrates an unusually reflexive relationship to recent Western feminist history both in terms of acknowledging ‘contradictory possibilities’, and by recognizing a particular trajectory as fictional, the ‘sisterhood’ is still ‘lost’ albeit ‘imagined’, such that we are left stranded, once again, in an apocalyptic ‘post-unitary feminist landscape’. The loss is in fact of the *belief* that there was unity, yet without that belief, however ironic a distance one takes from it, further alliance is deemed unimaginable. For Robyn Wiegman (2000) such apocalyptic feminist positions expect the present to resemble the past. When it does not, a radical break is imagined and the future abandoned, leaving only the cultivation of memory. In the process, the proponents of a feminist poststructuralist position are implicitly or explicitly marked as masculinist, while proponents of an earlier, and better, era are marked as authentically feminist.

The second counter narrative I am interested in is one that positions poststructuralism as an *interruption* to concerns with the social world. As with the reverse narrative, poststructuralism is cast as irredeemably apolitical, but in contrast to the apocalyptic or nostalgic tone of the former, this second counter narrative proposes we advance through a ‘return’ to what remains valuable, although that ‘return’ is no longer innocent. I am thinking here of pleas that we return to a focus on everyday lived experience or material realities instead of remaining mired in a conceptual or linguistic realm deemed to have no value outside of the academy (Jackson, 2001; Nussbaum, 1999). The key arenas for feminist theory where this ‘return’ is pivotal are debates about the political versus the cultural that dominated the mid-late nineties (notably Butler, 1997 and Fraser, 1997), empirical research versus social theory as providing access to the everyday (Walby, 2000), and a resurgence of interest in psychic excess as a challenge to the failures of the social constructivist account of the subject (Massumi, 2002; Sedgwick, 2003).

It is not my intention to dismiss the importance of the everyday for feminist theory – far from it – but to indicate the impact of its invocation as a solution to a largely imagined problem. While ostensibly challenging a developmental narrative that sees poststructuralism emerge heroic the other side of difference challenges to the essentialist seventies, the counter narrative of a ‘return’ to the material or the real before poststructuralism retains and endorses the same teleology. In effect, then, feminist calls for a ‘return’ to common-sense principles rely on and reproduce the separation of feminist poststructuralists from their feminist citation tracks I discussed above. The (feminist) political must have been displaced by the (abstract) cultural in order to be reasserted, a focus on the text must have replaced a focus on the experiential and so forth. And of course their absolute difference from one another must be maintained for the hierarchical and temporal separation of key terms to work. In addition to the specific debates that I have mentioned here we also see the same ‘return’ in academic practices such as the circulation of the casual phrase ‘call me old

fashioned, but . . .’ in teaching and lecturing contexts. This phrase and others like it are always delivered in the same rather smug tone, the prelude to the declaration of a truth no longer imagined to be fashionable, an indication of one’s own ability to move beyond the constraints of a contemporary cutting edge. The placing of oneself in the unfashionable past, then, becomes a primary technique for placing oneself at the centre of the yet-to-be-validated future.

This counter temporality is secured by a range of overlaid binaries and citation practices that mirror those I have been discussing throughout this article. The following example uses the oppositions of feminism–poststructuralism and world–text in the familiar chronological and hierarchical manner:

Feminists, and to a certain extent anti-racists, have cautioned . . . that many post-structuralist positions maintain an androcentric viewpoint and that others, despite their theoretical challenge to hegemonic meanings, do little to change the material conditions of marginalized groups such as women and racialized peoples (Bondi, 1990). Socialist feminists, in particular, have argued that deconstructionists are as trapped as many of their predecessors in self-referential language systems and, as a result, actually do little to change the world. . . . We too are cautious of wandering too close to the abyss of nihilism, and of dissolving political efficacy within a ‘justice of multiplicities’ (Lyotard, 1984; cf. Kobayashi, 1993). (*Gender, Place and Culture*, 1994)

The function of the passage is to restore order, to ask us to return to more sensible (less nihilistic) times, when difference had not got out of control. These pleas appeal to our common sense and to our pragmatic sense of how the world works and seek to make academics themselves confess that they always were a little uncomfortable with the reified language and discursive claims of poststructuralism. For who could disagree that it is dangerous to wander ‘too close to the abyss of nihilism’? To achieve this aim the pragmatic counter narratives do not engage particular theorists, but petition their own and their readers’ idea of poststructuralism, commonly by reference to secondary source summaries. For example:

As Rosenau points out, materialist approaches are an anathema to many forms of postmodernism. Postmodernists of various persuasions (both the nihilistic ‘skeptics’ and the more moderate ‘affirmatives’) reject those versions of modern social science that claim a materialist reality. This leads them to embrace idealist and relativist approaches to knowledge . . . This relativism cripples their ability to adjudicate between different knowledge claims. (*Gender & Society*, 1997)<sup>27</sup>

The deflection of argument onto someone else, in this case Rosenau, and its emphatic authorial endorsement – ‘As Rosenau points out . . .’ – produce a sense of this particular story as accepted, as fact rather than interpretation. Referencing of theorists most commonly associated with feminism’s ‘turn to language’ is also habitually managed through secondary source citation, where interpretation stands as evidence of the text’s meaning, or through a general paraphrasing of ideas.

The disciplinary as well as methodological separation that is a central effect of this narrative of return is worth closer attention. If a materialist approach

is understood to provide more transparent access to social reality than textual analysis in these counter narratives, if economic facts provide more political clarity than representational traces, then a call to return to the former is an assertion about the truth being accessible via specific disciplinary methods as much as it is about theoretical approaches. Stevi Jackson is explicit about the call for a 'return' to material inquiry as a concomitant call for disciplinary specificity when she notes that 'a materialist perspective is necessarily a sociologically informed one; hence, in reasserting the importance of the material and the social, I am also seeking to reclaim some fundamental sociological insights' (2001: 284). Likewise, Sylvia Walby's insistence that, '[f]eminist theory should embrace argumentation and the scientific method, rather than seeing knowledge as limited by social location' (2000: 203), is a clear call for methodological reinstatement. My examples here privilege social science over the humanities of course, but this is not always the case. Attention to identity formation through narrative coherence over temporal dissonance, or affect over social context, for example, privilege literature, psychoanalysis and philosophy over cultural studies. In a sense then the pragmatic call for a 'return' to academic common sense is also a call for disciplinary specificity, training and rigour, a challenge to the interdisciplinary eclecticism associated with poststructuralist, and of course feminist, approaches.

## Conclusion

Thus far, I have been mapping some of the ways in which narratives of the recent feminist past, whether seen as successes or failures, fix its teleological markers in very similar ways. One might simply argue that it is in the nature of all story-telling to generalize, but to return to the genealogical inquiry I began this article with, my concern is with which markers stick over others, and with where our narratives position us as subjects of feminist history and theory. This particular selective story detaches feminism from its own past by generalizing the seventies to the point of absurdity, fixing identity politics as a phase, evacuating poststructuralism of any political purchase, and insisting we bear the burden of these fantasized failings. In the process we disappear class, race and sexuality only to rediscover them 'anew' as embodiment and agency. Small wonder it is not clear what the future of feminist theory holds. In closing, let me ask the following. How might feminist theory generate a proliferation of stories about its recent past that more accurately reflect the diversity of perspectives within (or outside) its orbit? How might we reform the relationship between feminism's constituent parts to allow what are currently phantom presences to take shape? Can we do feminist theory differently?

My starting point, in what will inevitably be a longer set of reflections, concerns the role of the citation of key feminist theorists. As I have argued, in the doubled story of Western feminist theory, Butler, Haraway and Spivak are imaginatively positioned at the threshold of the 'death of feminism' in several ways. They are celebrated for pointing to the failures of an 'early' feminist emphasis on sisterhood, and heralded as marking the



long-awaited theoretical sophistication of feminist theory. Yet in this narrative, and in the counter narratives that dispute this celebration, these authors are split from their own legacies within feminism, symbolically, textually and politically situated as 'other' to and 'after' that imagined past. In the counter narratives that position poststructuralism as apolitical and self-referential, these same theorists are understood both as marking the death of politically accountable feminism, and as embodying that death through their own self-referential academic style, frequently denoted in classroom and conference contexts as aggressive inaccessibility. In both versions of the story, it is the specificity of feminist accounts of difference, power and knowledge at all points in the recent past that is elided.

Instead, I would advocate an approach stressing the links rather than the discontinuities between different theoretical frameworks, as a way of challenging the linear 'displacement' of one approach by another. Firstly, schools of thought conventionally pitted against one another, for example sexual difference and gender theories, might productively be read for their rather different approaches to the common problem of power in the production of sexual and gendered meaning. Might there be a methodological rigour to be extrapolated from my perhaps naïve equal enjoyment of Rosi Braidotti and Judith Butler, despite their own insistence on their irreducible difference from one another (Braidotti, 2002; Butler, 2004)? Might it be productive to think through the still harder task of reconnecting Gayatri Spivak with Luce Irigaray, so that the latter's consistent citation predominantly as object of postcolonial critique becomes more difficult to justify (Spivak, 1987; Irigaray, 1985)?

A closely related second genealogical approach would start from the citational absences in the secondary readings of those feminist theorists overburdened with marking a shift away from feminism. If we insist that, from a feminist perspective, Butler takes her deconstructive cue from Monique Wittig, as she clearly does, the former's role as 'the first' to challenge (1981) 'woman' as the ground of feminist inquiry becomes impossible to sustain. If we rewrite one of the statements introduced earlier – 'Judith Butler transformed the study of gender by using Foucault to apply poststructuralist conceptions of the subject to it' (*Australian Feminist Studies*, 2003) – to 'Judith Butler transformed the study of gender by using Wittig to apply Marxist/lesbian concepts of the subject to it' we see that the shift is more than citational. A valuing of the citational absences used to cement the doubled story I am contesting here repositions both Wittig and Butler, and tells the story of *Gender Trouble* as continuous with its feminist points of reference.<sup>28</sup> What I am suggesting as a feminist alternative to changing the historical record here is a process of revaluing currently sidelined traces of already key rather than marginal feminist figures. In doing so I hope this work might have two primary effects: firstly to highlight the restricted nature of what we already think we know about those figures and their histories; and secondly, to suggest a way of imagining the feminist past somewhat differently – as a series of ongoing contests and relationships rather than a process of imagined linear displacement.

## Notes

1. In both cases, I concur with Jackie Stacey's suggestion that 'this history is a progress narrative of the most conventional kind; we are presented as the enlightened, knowing subjects at the end of a progressional history' (1993: 59).
2. Toril Moi (1999) argues that Simone de Beauvoir, for example, had already identified what we later come to know as 'gender trouble' in the forties and fifties. Such challenges to poststructuralism's unique position tend to see individual theorists as the problem, however, rather than setting them in the context of their critical and institutional reception.
3. For example, if sexual difference theory is associated with essentialism, as it is in the 'progress strand' of the feminist story I am tracing here (Butler, 1990; Spivak, 1987), its prioritization in French and Italian feminist thinking can only stand as evidence of these contexts' lack of development in comparison. Only when rewritten as appropriately 'postmodern' can its claim to contemporary relevance be substantiated (Schor, 1995).
4. I will provide a short information note from each journal's web page when I first reference it.
5. Feminist historiographic work includes Rosi Braidotti's 'Feminist Genealogies' (1991), Joan Scott's 'Gender: a Useful Category of Historical Analysis' (1988), and Gayatri Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999). Queer historiographic work includes Jennifer Terry's 'Theorizing Deviant Historiography' (1991), Teresa de Lauretis's 'Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation' (1988), and Judith Halberstam's 'Perverse Presentism' (1998). In all cases this work takes a dual tack, critiquing dominant historical accounts of gendered or sexual meaning, and proposing alternative approaches at the level of methodology over content.
6. Spivak's historiographic discussion is in part a case for interdisciplinarity, where the idea of a dominant canon, theoretical framing and methodologies are usually more contested and thus more subject to scrutiny. Spivak's intervention might be read as a critique of Wendy Brown's (1997) assertion in 'The Impossibility of Women's Studies' that disciplinary knowledge (rather than the vagaries of interdisciplinary knowledge) should be the starting point for a feminist curriculum.
7. As a starting point, I would draw the reader's attention to the following texts: Bethel and Smith's *Conditions: The Black Women's Issue* (1979); June Jordan's *Things That I Do in the Dark* (1977); Audre Lorde's 'Man Child: a Black Lesbian Feminist's Response' (1979); Pauli Murray's 'The Liberation of Black Women' (1970); and Pat Parker's *Movement in Black* (1978).
8. Early research on the 1970s was completed with Josephine Brain. See our co-authored article on the demonization of the seventies (Hemmings and Brain, 2003), and the collection as a whole, *The Feminist Seventies*, in which it appears (Graham et al., 2003).
9. In part, the narrative of 1970s essentialism can be promulgated because much early 1970s work is now out of print, or hard to obtain. For an excellent reintroduction to the diversity of this decade see Krichmar, Smith and Widerrecht's (1977) international bibliography. For a more, but not exclusively, UK focused reintroduction to the 1970s, visit The Women's Library in London, which houses an extensive collection of first

- and second wave feminist materials – see <http://www.thewomenslibrary.ac.uk/>
10. The progress or decline narrative in feminist theory textbooks is, if anything, more marked than in journal articles, since their task is precisely to map shifts. In readers, the exception to the essentialist rule is pervasive, with consistent inclusion of one or two black feminist writers in the seventies, a practice that ultimately underscores, instead of challenging, a reader's sense of that decade's homogeneity. For textbooks, see Richardson and Robinson (1993), Tong (1998), Weedon (1999) and Whelehan (1995). For readers see Jackson (1993) and Nicholson (1997). Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan's (2002) *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World*, pays more attention to 'difference' from the outset, but the texts included are overwhelmingly US, despite the subtitle. An interesting exception to the decade by decade approach is Wendy Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski's (2005) *Feminist Theory* reader, which cuts across decades with sections '1963–1975', '1975–1985' and so on.
  11. *Theory, Culture & Society* was launched in 1982 to cater for the resurgence of interest in culture in the social sciences . . . *Theory, Culture & Society* has been widely acclaimed for its innovative editorial policy, typified by its agenda-setting special issues on topics such as the fate of modernity; global culture; postmodernism; the body; ethics and difference; and love and eroticism. (Extract from <http://tcs.ntu.ac.uk/tcs/>. Journal published by SAGE)
  12. Other authors who have commented on the function of nostalgia in feminist theory include Jackie Stacey (1993) and Lynne Huffer (1998). For a comprehensive account of nostalgia in the formation of national and gendered narrative more generally see Pickering and Kehde (1997).
  13. The aim of *Gender, Place and Culture* is to provide a forum for debate in human geography and related disciplines on theoretically-informed research concerned with gender issues. It also seeks to highlight the significance of such research for feminism and women's studies. (Extract from <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/0966369X.asp>. Journal published by Carfax Publishing)
  14. Margaretta Jolly (2003) makes the important point that, caught between the homogenized seventies and the difference nineties, work from the eighties is rarely analysed as an 'era' in its own right.
  15. *Feminist Studies* is committed to publishing an interdisciplinary body of feminist knowledge that sees differences in racial identity, sexual orientation, economic means, geographical location, and physical ability as the touchstone for our politics and our intellectual analysis. Whether work is drawn from the complex past or the shifting present, the pieces that appear in *Feminist Studies* address social and political issues that intimately and significantly affect women and men in the United States and around the world. (Extract taken from <http://www.feministstudies.org/aboutfs/mission.html>. Journal self-published and located at the University of Maryland)
  16. *Feminist Review* is an international peer reviewed journal edited by a Collective based in the UK . . . *Feminist Review* was founded in 1979 with the objective of

uniting 'research and theory with political practice and contributing to the development of both' . . . Our aim is to promote materialist work which is informed by both socio-economic and cultural representational issues. (Extract from <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/fr/homepage/index.html>. Journal published by Palgrave)

17. Perhaps one of the broader effects of such a teleology is the otherwise rather overstated opposition between feminism and queer theory (McIntosh, 1993; Weed and Schor, 1997). Within my framing, here, queer theory's poststructuralist credentials can be measured by its distance from an (anachronistic) feminist focus on (dis)empowerment.
18. As Susan Gubar notes, as 'the most often cited authority on the matter of white feminists' racism . . . [Spivak] combines an attention toward racial identity politics with . . . poststructuralist methodologies' (1998: 892). In this sense, Spivak is more of a transitional figure than the other two.
19. *Body & Society* was launched in 1995 to cater for the upsurge of interest in the social and cultural analysis of the human body that has taken place in recent years . . . *Body & Society* centrally concerns itself with debates in feminism, technology, ecology, postmodernism, medicine, ethics and consumerism which take the body as the central analytic issue in the questioning of established paradigms. (Extract from <http://tcs.ntu.ac.uk/body/>. Journal published by SAGE)
20. The first thirty years of *Critical Inquiry* witnessed the emergence of structuralism and poststructuralism, cultural studies, feminist theory and identity politics, media and film studies, speech act theory, new historicism, new pragmatism, visual studies and the new art history, new cognitive and psychoanalytic systems, gender studies, new forms of materialist critique, postcolonial theory, and discourse analysis, queer theory and (more recently) 'returns' to formalism and aesthetics, and to new forms of public and politically committed intellectual work. (Extract from <http://www.uchicago.edu/research/jnl-crit-inq/features/specialsymposium.html>. Journal published by University of Chicago Press)
21. As an international, peer reviewed journal, *Australian Feminist Studies* publishes academic articles from throughout the world which contribute to current developments in the new and burgeoning fields of Women's Studies and feminist research . . . We also aim to encourage discussion of interactions between feminist theory and practice; consideration of government and trade union policies that concern women; comment on changes in educational curricula relevant to Women's Studies; sharing of innovative course outlines, reading lists and teaching/learning strategies; reports on local, national and international conferences; reviews, critiques, enthusiasm and correspondence. (Extract from <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/08164649.asp>. Journal published by Carfax Publishing)
22. There are a large number of recent texts that include an account of depoliticization. These tend to be either critiques of the progressive institutionalization of feminist thought (e.g. Messer-Davidow, 2002; Stanley and Wise, 2000; Stromquist, 2001), or memoirs of 'the good old days' of feminist unity of purpose, the loss of which is the object of contemporary melancholia (e.g. Brownmiller, 2000; Ehrenreich, 1990;

- Segal, 2000). Wendy Brown (1999) suggests this melancholy characterizes contemporary left thought more generally, but she leaves intact the progress narrative that is the other side of the same coin.
23. I would mark a distinction here between work that seeks to value that which ‘the linguistic turn’ obscured (e.g. Massumi, 2002; Walby, 2000; Jackson, 2001), and work that seeks to combine the insights of poststructuralism with further experimentation (e.g. Braidotti, 2002; Cavarero, 2002).
24. *Feminist Theory* is an international interdisciplinary journal that provides a forum for critical analysis and constructive debate within feminism . . . *Feminist Theory* is genuinely interdisciplinary and reflects the diversity of feminism, incorporating perspectives from across the broad spectrum of the humanities and social sciences and the full range of feminist political and theoretical stances. (Extract from <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journal.aspx?pid=105555>. Journal published by SAGE)
25. Mary Evans noted this tendency to demonize ‘the selfish feminist academic’ in favour of ‘the true believer’ in the 1980s (Evans, 1982: 61, 70). Perhaps the most high profile espouser of this view is Martha Nussbaum, who dismisses poststructuralism in fervent terms:
- Feminist thinkers of the new symbolic type would appear to believe that the way to do feminist politics is to use words in a subversive way, in academic publications of lofty obscurity and disdainful abstractness. These symbolic gestures, it is believed, are themselves a form of political resistance; and so one need not engage with messy things such as legislatures and movements in order to act daringly. (Nussbaum, 1999: 37)
26. Nussbaum is in fact unusual in characterizing this academic feminist as passive rather than duplicitous. In addressing her confusion about who Butler’s audience is, Nussbaum concludes:
- It would seem that she is addressing a group of young feminist theorists in the academy who are neither students of philosophy, caring about what Althusser and Freud and Kripke really said, nor outsiders, needing to be informed about the nature of their projects and persuaded of their worth. This implied audience is imagined as remarkably docile. Subservient to the oracular voice of Butler’s text, and dazzled by its patina of high-concept abstractness, the imagined reader poses few questions, requests no arguments and no clear definitions of terms. (Nussbaum, 1999: 38)
27. A DISTINCTIVELY SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER – *Gender & Society* examines gender as one of the foundations of every existing social order. Emphasizing theory and research from micro- and macrostructural perspectives, *Gender & Society* aims to advance both the study of gender and feminist scholarship. (Extract from <http://www.sagepub.com/journal.aspx?pid=50>. Journal published by SAGE)
28. But surely *Gender Trouble* favours Foucault over Wittig? In fact, in direct discussion of their work, Butler devotes 18 pages to Foucault and 17 to Wittig, and the author’s critical knife is applied rather equally in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Foucault’s ‘sentimental indulgence’ (Butler, 1990: 96) mirrors Wittig’s ‘thoroughgoing appropriation’ (1990: 128).

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