

**DERRIDEAN DECONSTRUCTION AND
FEMINISM:**

Exploring Aporias in Feminist Theory and Practice

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Abstract

This thesis examines the politics of deconstruction within the interdisciplinary field of Women's Studies and the question as to whether deconstruction has a politics, or can enhance the political goals of western feminism. This thesis argues that philosophy, and deconstruction in particular, is extremely useful for re-thinking feminist issues, especially around subjectivity and agency, but is not always seen to be so by some Australian feminists. As a result, Australian feminism, like feminism in other Anglophone countries, founded on the dichotomy of sameness-difference, has run out of theoretical and political steam. This thesis explores deconstruction within feminist debates and practices from the mid-1980s to present. In exploring both the contribution of deconstruction to rethinking difference and agency, and the failure on the part of most Australian women's studies programs to apply the full potential of deconstruction, an argument is put forward for the value of deconstruction as a way of rethinking the question of woman's subordination. While this is not a new area of study, this thesis focuses on the political efficacy of deconstruction, which is not always directly addressed in feminist texts.

The first three chapters focus on the ways deconstruction has been interpreted, often negatively, by Anglo feminists or feminists in the English speaking world. It identifies the central issues taken up by feminist critics of deconstruction; argues that confusion has arisen largely due to interpretative misunderstandings of Derrida's central tenets; and presents an elucidation of the radical potential of deconstruction for a feminist politics, especially in relation to female subjectivity.

The last two chapters turn their attention to the debates over the meaning of deconstruction and the ways deconstruction entered the academy in Australia through Women's Studies courses. They examine the specific discursive and institutional frameworks that aided or impeded the critical reception of new theoretical directions in Australia; argue that deconstruction entered Australian feminist discourse mainly in response to a dissatisfaction with the philosophy of Marxism/socialism; and detail major influences and theoretical works that made possible a more positive reception of deconstructive tenets within Australian feminism.

The thesis concludes with a brief discussion of the crosscurrents between Australian and international feminist philosophy and outlines how deconstruction might continue to advance feminist understandings of subjectivity and enhance feminist practice.

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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Introduction

While the debate about whether feminist theory should or should not draw on deconstruction is not a particularly new one, it is fair to say that many issues remain unresolved. This thesis suggests that deconstruction has not been well received by mainstream western feminism and explores some feminist objections by drawing attention to contributing factors, some of which are not widely discussed, including feminism's relationship with philosophy. This thesis argues for the usefulness of deconstruction to feminism, demonstrating what deconstruction is, and what it can do for feminist theory and practice, especially in relation to subjectivity and agency. In addition, this thesis attempts to find out why some feminists dismiss deconstruction and the thesis looks at ways to address their principal concerns.

The thesis begins with a discussion of international western debates and understandings of deconstruction, ending with a focus on Australian feminism. A detailed exploration of deconstruction is necessary, as many arguments feminists make against deconstruction are due to a lack of understanding of its complexities (Chapter Three). The thesis considers how feminist theorists took up or resisted deconstruction—how Derrida's ideas were received within Anglo-feminist philosophy and political theory. The thesis argues that Anglo-feminists, in the main, had little background in philosophy, or if they did, it was with analytic or Marxist traditions. As is shown in Chapters Four and Five, Australian feminists had little exposure to continental philosophy, which fed misunderstandings and raw interpretations of deconstruction and its connection to French feminism. Confusion and uncertainty around French feminism and deconstruction led to two decades of debate (in the 1980s and 1990s). The focus of the debates was not solely to resist poststructuralism but also to clarify basic terms and tenets and think through their implications for feminism and a 'feminist movement'.

The thesis explores why some feminists in Australia accept particular aspects of deconstruction but reject its more radical project. The sad fact is that, after many decades of feminism, we still live in a society where women are disadvantaged, and women's services are diminishing. Liberal, Marxist and socialist philosophies led to

a politics that advanced women's status, but almost entirely through claiming women's sameness with men. The application of equality discourses that do not acknowledge women's difference from men, has meant that women's disadvantage remains (especially when race/class/sexual orientation are taken into account). Viewing this stalled revolution through the lens of politics deconstruction offers a critique of modernist 'politics' defined by individual-state relations, extending perceptions of 'the political' to encompass broader understandings of how subjects and cultures are constituted by institutional and discursive frameworks. Thus, political struggle for feminists should mean a new relationship to subjectivity and politics. According to Grosz:

Feminist theory needs to reconceptualize the terms by which it understands subjectivity. Instead of regarding feminist politics as a struggle around the rights and needs of female subjects, individually or as a category, subjugated by male subjects, who require a more adequate and respectful recognition by male subjects ... feminist and other forms of political struggle may more ably function as a mode of rendering the subject the backdrop to a play of forces which are themselves what constitute the ever shifting and uncontrollable terrain of politics and identities. Feminist theory is not the struggle to liberate women, even though it has tended to conceive of itself in these terms (if this is its function, it has failed miserably!); it is the struggle to render more mobile, fluid, and transformable the means by which the female subject is produced and represented. It is the struggle to produce a future in which forces align in ways fundamentally different for the past and present (Grosz 2005, p 193).

To this end Luce Irigaray's *écriture féminine* plays out what feminine subjectivity might look like. While, for some feminists the combination of a deconstructive philosophy and feminist politics is an anathema, the writing of the feminine is important for feminists as it can

be transformative, not merely disruptive. ... political activity, if it is to avoid the ever present danger of the restoration of the masculine-dominated world feminism seeks to dismantle, demands that we write the feminine that has been pushed to the 'rere' so that we can enact a critical standpoint by which to judge 'their' world as false, precisely because it pretends to be the 'whole' (Cornell 1991, p 3).¹

For Elizabeth Grosz, "political practice remains incomplete without an accompanying production of concepts that help welcome and generate political, conceptual, and artistic experimentation" (Grosz 2005, p 168). Deconstruction offers feminism a philosophy which generates new ideas that challenge assumptions about past certainties, such as what constitutes 'the political'.

¹ Cornell uses the term 'rere' to signify, "the discovery of the letter [as] a rediscovery. The letter is always, already being written. ... Feminine 'reality' is brought from the 'rere' to the fore in the writing of the letter." (Cornell 1991, p 1-2).

Having ‘discovered’ deconstruction and being convinced by its compelling project while an undergraduate student in the early 1990s, I was surprised to find that a number of feminists resisted its critique or the possibilities for its implementation. Thus, the ethical and political dimensions of deconstruction are not realised. This thesis shows how deconstruction aims to undermine the gender divide that operates as a hierarchy by breaking “open the prison of what has been called ontology, which becomes a prison precisely because it seems to shut out all our other possibilities as ‘unreal’. Derridean deconstruction exposes the limit of any system of ideality² established as reality” (Cornell 1991, p 18).

This thesis also argues that the ways in which Women’s Studies was institutionalised in Australia determined or structured to a certain extent feminists’ engagement with theoretical paradigms. A review of the establishment of Women’s Studies in a selection of Australian universities is provided as a way of understanding the theoretical possibilities and obstacles available to feminists for teaching and research. Some important antecedents concerning the development of feminist theory are highlighted, especially those that impact on the subsequent adoption of deconstruction. In other words, this thesis investigates the particular history of Australian feminist theory to show the ways in which deconstruction has been taken up, and to reflect on the reasons for the limitation of contemporary engagement with deconstruction.

This thesis does not claim that deconstruction is simple to understand or easy to adopt, which is perhaps one reason for some feminists to recoil from it. However, deconstruction is also not impenetrable if its philosophical trajectories are followed. Indeed, when adopted by feminist critics, deconstruction advances knowledge, unsettles old certainties about concepts, such as unity and sisterhood, leads to new potentialities for self definition, and cautions us against a humanist politics of complicity, where woman can only mimic man.

² According to Cornell, systems of ‘ideality’ need to be deconstructed, otherwise “the idea that we are hostage to the way things are now, to a human matrix constructed through gender hierarchy, is belied as an illusion that fails to understand the full significance of the Derridean insight that reality is only ‘there’ as textual effect” (Cornell 1991, p 18).

Feminism's response to or relationship with western philosophy is complex. This is reflected in the array of responses to particular western philosophies within feminist theory. For instance, feminism has a history of critical response to dominant ideologies such as liberalism, Marxism, existentialism and so forth. In other words, feminism throughout its intellectual history has responded to a variety of 'male' philosophies, either adapting them or rejecting them, yet almost always in an anxious mode. Indeed feminists have been divided as to which of these is preferable: adaptation or outright rejection. The debates about the 'unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism' in the 1980s are a prime example.³ Feminist responses to engagement with structuralism and poststructuralism, as well as deconstruction, also reflect this tension.

Derrida's seminal texts *Of Grammatology* (1976) and *Writing and Difference* (1978) outline what has come to be understood as his deconstructive project. Moreover, these texts are important in locating deconstruction within a philosophical tradition and one that has influenced feminist deconstructive philosophies. However, while the political implications of deconstruction are implied in Derrida's early works, they are not overtly apparent. Derrida's later works including *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, The Work of Mourning, and the New International* (1994), *The Politics of Friendship* (1997) and the essays in *On Cosmopolitanism and On Forgiveness* (2001) engage with the political in more direct ways. Feminist texts on deconstruction that have been particularly useful include Drucilla Cornell's *The Philosophy of the Limit* (1992b) and Elizabeth Grosz' *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (1989). Feminist texts that engage with the political application of deconstruction include Cornell's *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction, and the Law* (1991) and Grosz' *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (2005), especially Chapter Four, "The Time of Violence: Derrida, Deconstruction, and Value". These texts are important as they explicitly outline the relationship between a feminist 'politics' and deconstruction.

³ For more details see Sargent (1981).

Thesis Structure and Overview

This thesis is divided into five main chapters, preceded by an introduction and succeeded by a conclusion. Chapter One positions deconstruction within a philosophical trajectory and identifies where western feminism takes issue with philosophy. The first aim of this project is to situate the argument of the thesis in a field of inquiry, addressing the main issues that arise when terms such as postmodernism and poststructuralism are conflated. The second aim is to highlight feminism's relationship with philosophy by looking at the way the discipline of philosophy has been constructed and how feminist theory is often placed outside of this construction. The combination of these two issues puts into perspective the argument that feminism and philosophy have a mutual history of suspicion and distrust.

Chapter Two explores one of the major themes of the thesis: feminism's construction of subjectivity. It traces the way in which deconstruction alters modernist constructs of subjectivity and explores the ramifications of this for feminism. By looking at three important positions taken up in feminist debates during the influential period of the 1980s, namely 'Identity Politics', 'Difference Politics' and 'Deconstruction', this chapter illustrates that 'the subject', as theorised in the first two positions, stands at odds with and thus limits the ways in which a deconstructive approach has been received.

Chapter Three explores in detail the meaning of deconstruction in feminist debates. This chapter provides a close reading of Derrida's key terms, introduced and explicated in his early texts, with an emphasis on deconstruction's political promise for feminism. Pivotal concepts, such as *differánce* and trace, are analysed as a way of elucidating deconstruction's potential for feminism. According to Cornell:

The politics of difference demands that we think the new, the different. But, of course, whenever we think the new, we can only conceive of it within the pregiven ideality. The pregiven ideality, which undoubtedly established the intelligible, also serves as an undertow to repetition. The role of the aesthetic in the dreaming of the new, the different, beyond the current machine of sado-masochism, lies precisely in its power to evoke, and indeed to challenge, the very conventions of intelligibility which make us 'see' the world from the viewpoint of the masculine. The explicit 'use' of feminine language is one tool in undermining current conceptualizations in which the world, ethics and politics are perceived. ... Without the aesthetic evocation of utopian possibility of feminine difference, we are left with the politics of revenge (Cornell 1991, p 185).

While Cornell and Grosz are strong advocates of deconstruction Chapter Three also outlines some feminist criticisms of deconstruction and responds to these concerns within a deconstructive feminist politics.

Chapter Four shifts the focus of the thesis from questions of deconstruction within international feminist philosophical debates to the way deconstruction was introduced into Australia through Women's Studies courses. As debates over the meaning of deconstruction and its usefulness are situated largely within the academy it is useful to look at the environment in which it operates as a pretext for examining the ways deconstruction was both taken up and resisted within the Australian academy. To achieve this, an overview of the introduction and teaching of Women's Studies in Australia is presented. This chapter argues that deconstruction's reception in Australian feminist theory is marked by Women's Studies' development as a discipline within a particular institutional and discursive framework, including its relationship with Marxist and socialist theories and with the Women's Liberation Movement.

Chapter Five explores the importance of deconstruction in Australia, beginning with its theoretical antecedents. While Chapter Four considers the way Women's Studies was institutionalised, focussing on competing demands from academics within the university and some feminist organizations outside the university. Chapter Five reflects on why some (theoretical) aspects of deconstruction or poststructuralism were (and are) taken up by Australian feminist academics, while others were (and are) not. This chapter identifies some of the philosophical precursors to deconstruction as it was received in Australian feminism, including the impact of socialism, the work of Michel Foucault, and psychoanalysis. It argues that, in the main, deconstruction in Australia entered feminist discourses mainly as a result of dissatisfaction with the philosophy of Marxism/socialism. In addition, the work of Luce Irigaray, which was mediated through the writings of Elizabeth Grosz, the cross currents of poststructuralist feminists at conferences, including Gayatri Spivak and Toril Moi's visits to Australia, and Australian feminists studying abroad, have been a major influence on the reception of deconstructive tenets within Australian feminism.

This thesis is not deconstructive in method. Rather it concludes by highlighting some aspects of deconstruction that might be useful to feminist theory, particularly in advancing feminist understanding of subjectivity. It traces the historical influence of deconstruction on international feminist debates and outlines the deconstruction/feminism interface within an Australian context. Having examined the main arguments for the marginalisation of deconstruction, including a detailed examination of the deconstructive project, the conclusion argues for a closer relationship between feminism and deconstruction.

Chapter 1: Laying the Foundations – Feminism and Deconstruction

Introduction

The thesis investigates two major (related) criticisms that feminists have of deconstruction, namely that it contests women's 'agency', that is, the presumption of autonomy, rationality and thus efficacy in a (narrowly conceived) political arena, and that deconstruction puts into question the possibility of a unified feminist movement that could represent the interests of all women, and the essentialist premises on which this politics was founded. However, it is also important to address more minor arguments which impact on deconstruction's reception. These arguments revolve around feminism's relationship to philosophy and understandings of the 'post discourses' and deconstruction's place within them. These two factors influenced the reception of deconstruction within feminist theory and practice. By way of introduction to the succeeding chapters this chapter explores feminism's relationship with philosophy, followed by an exposition of the need for a clear distinction between terms such as postmodernism and poststructuralism.

A number of factors led some feminists to challenge the project of western unified feminism from the early 1980s. For example, Australian feminists re-worked feminism's understanding of the subject in order to address, among other issues, race blindness, essentialism, unified subjectivity, and the rational normative subject. Multicultural feminists like Sneja Gunew who wrote and/or edited a number of books and anthologies of migrant women's writing, spurred on the revision of the subject.⁴ A decade later in Australia's history, from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, Aboriginal women's voices were vocal against a white feminism which claimed to represent all women, but only represented the interests of white, middle class women. Indeed, Catriona Felton and Liz Flanagan state that "feminism in Australia as in many countries is seen as having a White middle class background and many feminists tend to ignorantly believe that their ideology has some cross-

⁴ Gunew has written extensively on migrant women's writing: see Gunew (1982); Gunew and Reid (1982); Gunew (1983a); (1983b); (1985a); (1985b); Gunew and Spivak (1986); Gunew (1987a); Gunew (1988); Gunew (1990a); (1992); Gunew and Longley 1992; Gunew (1994); and Gunew (2004).

cultural applicability, and that all women should be embracing their perception of feminism” (Felton and Flanagan 1993, p 54). Moreover, and perhaps more confronting, Melissa Lucashenko, another Aboriginal woman, posited that:

Black women have a unique consciousness and understanding of this country’s [Australia’s] history. This consciousness means our reality is not your reality. What you call patriarchy, I call one aspect of colonisation: for all their commonalties, for all your hoping and wishing it, our oppression are not interchangeable. Whether you like it or not, as a white Australian woman you too are the root of my indigenous problem (Lucashenko 1994, p 22).

Critiques of feminism from women of colour were especially strident in the United States, including bell hooks, Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Toni Morrison. Like Aboriginal women, these women rejected feminism claiming that it did not/could not represent them.⁵ These issues are taken up in Chapter Two. For some feminists the end of socialism in the west, the rise of global capitalism, and the challenge to modernist premises across the disciplines led to a critique of the Cartesian subject and a move towards poststructuralism. Patti Lather, an American feminist pedagogist, challenged the existing social science methodologies with a ‘new’ approach to research. Lather states:

Situated in the crisis of authority that has occurred across knowledge systems, my challenge has been to make productive use of the dilemma of being left to work from traditions of research legitimacy and discourses of validity that appear no longer adequate to the task (Lather 1993, p 683).

Challenges to modernist assumptions, especially in relation to the subject, had different effects and emerged from different cultural, political, intellectual and material contexts. Some feminists turned to theory or philosophy in order to work through feminisms’ assumptions brought to the fore by the issues raised above. This chapter will outline the debates of the 1980s about whether feminists should engage with philosophy and how those debates affected issues of class and race. It especially focuses on three questions within feminist (mis)understandings of feminism’s relationship with philosophy (sometimes understood to encompass all philosophy and sometimes only poststructuralist—or deconstructive—strands): Is philosophy inherently masculine? Should feminists engage with the discipline of philosophy if it does not acknowledge feminist theories? Is a feminist philosopher contradictory, given the normative premises of philosophy?

⁵ See, for example, Morrison (1971), Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981) and hooks (1982).

Feminist Critiques of Philosophy

Feminism's longstanding and troubled relationship with philosophy impacts on the reception of deconstruction. Implicit within some feminist debates against poststructuralism is a distrust or suspicion of philosophy itself, even though feminist positions are implicitly grounded on philosophical positions, whether they are acknowledged or not.

Western philosophical theories impinge on (almost) all areas of western public life. Male philosophers have influenced present institutional practices with the collective insights gained over hundreds of years of philosophy, including their impact on law, democracy as a form of government and religious beliefs. It is therefore not surprising that feminists began to recognize and critique the pervasiveness of a masculine 'Western Philosophical Canon'.⁶ Hence it would be foolhardy to suggest that feminism need not concern itself with this discipline, or indeed, that this could even be possible.

In the main, the need to be critical of philosophical theories is accepted as a part of the general aim of feminism (Okin 1979; Lloyd 1984). However, some feminists argue that a more explicit move towards philosophy would be antithetical to the feminist agenda. Most feminists have identified the need for vigilance of existing philosophical theories for negative representations of women. However, there is a political praxis claim made by some feminists that further engagement with philosophical debates takes women into a realm of unnecessarily abstract and 'malestream' theory.⁷

Most of the criticisms of the move towards a closer relationship between feminism and philosophy revolve around three related themes. First is the contention that philosophy is gendered masculine and thus unable to deal with women's issues.

⁶ See, for example, de Beauvoir (1972 [1949]) for a discussion of Kant and Hegel; see Okin (1979) for a detailed critique of Western political thought, especially of Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau and Mill; and for a general text on ideas in philosophy and how women are constructed, which includes a critique on Descartes, see Lloyd (1984).

⁷ Jean Curthoys' work is an example of feminist resistance to philosophy, especially post-structuralism, see Curthoys (1997). For an example of a scathing critique of postmodernism see Brodribb (1992).

Second, is the apparent insignificance attached to the importance of whether feminists call themselves philosophers or not, if the discipline, or men (and in some instances women) within the discipline dismiss or do not engage with feminist theories. In other words, this second complaint sees the lack of reciprocity (from male philosophers) within philosophical discussions regarding feminist insights as problematic, not only in relation to feminism but also in assessing the value of a feminist engagement with philosophy. Third is the concept of a feminist philosopher as contradictory, given the basic ‘masculinist’ premises of philosophy. A discussion of each position is given below.

Is Philosophy Inherently Masculine?

Feminists working within modernist paradigms have long debated the presumed ‘maleness’ of philosophy. For instance, Susan Bordo working within a Foucauldian framework, critiques the work of Nancy Chodorow in order to demonstrate the ‘maleness’ of philosophy.⁸ Bordo frames her argument around Chodorow’s assumption of a distinct ‘female perspective’ and ‘male perspective’ which entails a feminine perspective that is relational to and not distinct from the masculine (Bordo 1988, p 626-629). While Chodorow’s theory may account for gender difference, it does not demonstrate how gender difference is linked to dominance, especially in relation to how hierarchical dualisms are linked to masculinity and therefore dominance.⁹ Moreover, Chodorow overlooks the arguments that lead feminists to question what constitutes ‘maleness’ or masculinity, terms which are discursively set in place to reproduce operations of power and privilege that maintain women’s disadvantage.

Jean Grimshaw’s (1986) *Philosophy and Feminist Thinking* questioned the legitimacy of formulating generalizations about trends or patterns, including gendered ones. Consequently, she presents an argument that challenges the assumption held by some feminists that philosophy is inherently ‘male’ because men

⁸ This is particularly evident in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Chodorow 1978). Chodorow’s work is a good example of ‘the maleness of philosophy’. By contrast, Carol Gilligan’s ‘Ethics of Care’ model addresses difference in a different way to Chodorow, and arguably avoids some of the criticisms directed at Chodorow’s work, see Gilligan (1982). Gilligan’s model is more pertinent to the discussions in Chapter Two.

⁹ Some feminists do link difference to subordination, see Mackinnon (1987; 1989).

have primarily authored it. Furthermore, some feminists limit themselves to asking *why* philosophy is male rather than addressing *how* philosophy is male, a far more interesting question taken up by feminists like Genevieve Lloyd in her text *The Man of Reason* (1984).

Luce Irigaray in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985) demonstrates the need to identify *how* philosophy is masculine. Thus, for Irigaray, it is important to first identify *how* philosophy is masculine in order to detect, and subsequently address, philosophy's absences or silences. Consequently, Irigaray seeks to locate the masculinism of philosophy. In *Speculum* she posits that women are not different from men so much as trapped inside a "circle of sameness".¹⁰ In other words, the possibilities for delineating gender difference within the current system of representation, considered through a western philosophical tradition from Plato through to Freud, is limited to reproducing subjects defined by the masculine norm in which women figure as not-men, that is inferior. Significantly, Irigaray suggests that this "system of sameness" disadvantages both men and women because men too are confined to masculine representations, which, while they may profit by them, repress other ways of being. The problem for women today, according to Irigaray, is achieving identity within a male demarcated scheme. Irigaray's influential essay "This Sex Which is not One" signals the serious yet playful direction of Irigaray's deconstruction of female identity within a phallogentric culture—this sex (the feminine) which is not a sex (because there is only one and it is masculine—signified by the presence or absence of the phallus), and not one (that is unified and defined by phallic wholeness) but rather multiple, fluid, and excessive (Irigaray 1980). For Irigaray, woman can only be signalled by what she is not, and reimagined through/as alterity. Thus, her philosophy is aimed at moving beyond a philosophy of 'sameness' to what Colebrook calls a philosophy of 'proximity' (Colebrook 1997, p 88). This is a philosophy that thinks beyond identity and (self) representation and away from the phallus as singular and visible. Instead, Irigaray imagines a philosophy that can think of 'and' as the 'other body' (Colebrook 1997, p 88).

¹⁰ Irigaray comes to this conclusion through a deconstructive reading of the work of Freud through to Plato, see Irigaray (1985b) and Irigaray (1993).

Irigaray's *écriture féminine* challenges the dominant way of thinking or philosophising. In other words, Irigaray shows how the western psychoanalytic and philosophic traditions, up until now, only represent the male/maleness, and women's relation to it. In arguing that philosophy is *inherently* masculine, Irigaray constitutes a radical break with the tradition. Chapter Three offers a more detailed explanation of *écriture féminine*.

The Discipline of Philosophy Does Not Acknowledge Feminist Theories

In spite of the large body of work by feminist theorists (like Jane Flax, Luce Irigaray, Elizabeth Grosz, Moira Gatens and Rosi Braidotti to name a few), contemporary western feminism has had little impact on dominant contemporary philosophical theorists.¹¹ Michel Foucault, for example, did not acknowledge feminist insights in any of his texts.¹² However, regardless of this absence/omission feminists cannot afford to overlook his work. As Jane Martin comments:

Take Foucault. Does this master's inattention to women, to male domination, to the genderization of power, discourse, reason, knowledge lead feminist theorists to dismiss his work? On the contrary, they quite rightly tell us that it is a rich source of understanding and empowerment (Martin 1994, p 651).

In fact, feminists have engaged significantly and in a variety of ways with Foucault's work. The importance of his work to feminism is indicated by the plethora of feminist interpretations/analysis currently available.¹³ Chapter Four outlines the ways in which feminists have incorporated and developed Foucauldian insights. It is also true that in their more recent work significant theorists, like Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty, are at some level engaging with feminist concerns.¹⁴ A detailed examination of Derrida's response to feminist issues will be given in Chapter Three.

¹¹ Margaret Whitford also alerts us to the lack of reciprocity in philosophical circles. She claims that "while feminists need philosophy of all kinds from phenomenology to poststructuralism, the men with rare exception do not seem to be returning the compliment" (Whitford 1992, p 112).

¹² According to Bidy Martin, "there are surprisingly very few references in Foucault's writings or in interviews with him to feminist analyses or to the women's movement in spite of the fact that he has identified sexuality as a privileged object of analysis" (Martin 1988, p 276).

¹³ There is an abundance of feminist work on the writing of Michel Foucault: see, for example, Butler (1987); Diamond and Quinby (1988); Diprose (1991); Sawicki (1991); and Ramazanoglu (1993).

¹⁴ While these theorists are engaging with feminist issues their commentary is not always well received. Nonetheless, it is important to note that putting feminist issues on the agenda is certainly a step towards change. For Rorty's comments on feminism, see Rorty (1991; 1993). For a feminist response to Rorty, see Bacchi (1992). For a more positive reading of Rorty and feminism see Seigfried (1991; 1993).

The Concept of a Feminist Philosopher is Contradictory Given the Basic Premises of Philosophy

In *The Feminist Philosopher: A Contradiction in Terms?* (1992) Margaret Whitford broaches the question of how philosophy is premised on assumptions of masculine sameness in which women can only be marked as different or inferior: a relational binary. She somewhat provocatively begins by stating that “it is a structured impossibility for a female philosopher to exist” (Whitford 1992, p 111). However, in spite of this assertion, she goes on to stress that female philosophers do exist, and somewhat cautiously bestows this honour on Luce Irigaray. She does so – cautiously – because, as Irigaray has shown, the subject of philosophy or any other discourse at this point in time, despite inclusive language, is a masculine subject.¹⁵

If one understands the subject of philosophy to be masculine, then reforming or adapting dominant theoretical paradigms will lead to “merely ask[ing] that philosophy be more truly philosophical” rather than questioning foundational precepts (Colebrook 1997, p 80). Instead Colebrook stresses that:

Philosophy does not just happen to repeat certain motifs (such as truth and universality). On the contrary, *philosophy* in general, unlike any other discourse (science, history, literature), claims for itself a certain constancy, a mode of questioning that must transcend any particular historicism or psychologism. The task of a feminist philosophy – which would be more than a philosophy carried out from a particular political position and which would be ‘other’ than a philosophy already identified as masculine – would require that we see philosophy in this more general sense and that we locate its masculinism at a more essential level (Colebrook 1997, p 83, author’s emphasis).

Certainly this is the task that Irigaray has undertaken. There is a strong ethical imperative to Irigaray’s work, similar to that which is echoed in the work of Emmanuel Lévinas.¹⁶ In other words, Irigaray and Lévinas share an understanding of the ‘sameness’ of western philosophy: a sameness which has necessarily precluded otherness or alterity. Nevertheless, Irigaray (1991) is critical of Lévinas’ account of the absolute other. Even so, she employs his radical insight concerning otherness in her account of difference as alterity, especially in relation to sexual difference (the face of the other).

¹⁵ Whitford states, “perhaps the most controversial aspect of my book on Irigaray...will turn out to be its claim that Irigaray should be seen as a philosopher” (Whitford 1992, p 115).

¹⁶ See Lévinas (1987).

Male foundational philosophical critics, like Eric Matthews, suggest that the only way a feminist philosophy could exist is if philosophy “could strive for concepts, categories, and patterns of thought which were genuinely universal, human, and rational” (Matthews 1996, p 205). However, as Chapter Three will demonstrate, foundational ‘human and rational’ principles are not what a poststructuralist philosophy, such as that espoused by Irigaray or Derrida, strives towards. Deconstruction has opened up possibilities for conceptualizing difference in non-foundational, non essentialist terms.

The questions raised above are not to be dismissed lightly: feminists need to be critical of all discourses, whether they be philosophy or science. That philosophy is inherently masculine is challenged by feminist philosophers, like Luce Irigaray, who are looking at *how* it is specifically masculine (phallic) in order to challenge this construction. Irigaray’s *écriture féminine* is an example of a philosophy that moves away from masculine (phallus as unitary) constructions towards plurality or the feminine. Moreover, feminists have used philosophies authored by men (but appropriately altered) to advance feminist questions, and to develop a feminist theory. The work of male theorists, like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, among others, is important to feminist theories of subjectivity and embodiment.¹⁷ Finally, feminist questions and insights are being adopted and addressed in some philosophers’ work, like that of Richard Rorty and Jacques Derrida, a reciprocity that was absent from male philosophers of the past.

Differences between Poststructuralism and Postmodernism

For the most part, historically from the early 1980s when deconstruction began to impact upon Anglo-feminists, terms such as modernism, postmodernism, postmodernity, structuralism, and poststructuralism were invoked by some feminists working within modernist frameworks without much differentiation, or in some cases clarification. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, common slippage between terms in the debates about postmodernism, poststructuralism and deconstruction was also found in philosophy, especially within the writings of

¹⁷ See, for instance, work done by Elizabeth Grosz (1994), Judith Butler (1994) and Drucilla Cornell (1992a) to name a few.

feminists hostile to the new wave, which helps explain why it was reflected within feminist debates of the time.¹⁸ This thesis stresses that, for the most part, the interchangeable use of these terms led to many confusions and (mis)interpretations concerning the possibility of a feminist deconstructive project and discouraged useful debate.

Judith Butler goes one step further: she points out that it is also important for feminists to distinguish between individual theorists. For instance, it is important to distinguish between “Lyotard’s work [which is] ... seriously at odds with that of Derrida, who does not affirm the notion of ‘the postmodern’” (Butler 1991, p 151).¹⁹ Drucilla Cornell is also keen to make this point. She states:

I have also argued that thinkers who are frequently identified as postmodernists, such as Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Lévinas, explicitly reject a concept of history which would accept this kind of rigid periodization. But the basis for my concern is not simply the respect for textual fidelity that is an ethical concern remaining at the heart of deconstruction, even when understood as a practice of reading. The focus of my concern is that the very articulation of what “postmodernism” purportedly “is” obscures crucial issues in feminist theory (Cornell 1995, p 156).

Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, it is necessary to distinguish between postmodernism and poststructuralism. Seyla Benhabib’s position on ‘postmodernism’ is characteristic of authors who conflate the work of so called postmodern theorists in order to dismiss deconstruction. For instance, it is evident that Benhabib’s (1994) account of the postmodern in *Feminism and the Postmodern* is narrow and limited, even though she claims to critique the work of Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler and Jane Flax. Instead, Benhabib’s text is confined to a study of Jean-François Lyotard, who is by no means representative of ‘the postmodern’, despite having coined the term. Lyotard stands in for Derrida, Butler, Flax and others as the object of Benhabib’s attack. Benhabib works within a Habermasian framework and retains the Cartesian subject. Her critique fails to address the significant philosophical positions that depart from this philosophical frame, nor does she mark the differences between these philosophical positions.

¹⁸ By way of example, see the debate between Judith Butler and Seyla Benhabib (Butler 1995).

¹⁹ Furthermore, Lyotard, according to Sarup, “was a militant for fifteen years in a small left-wing group called *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. ... He has never accepted the injunctions of structuralism and has criticized aspects of the work of Lèvi-Strauss” (Sarup 1989, p 106).

It is important to clarify (rather than complicate) the poststructuralist thinking presented in this thesis by examining where poststructuralism and deconstruction overlap with postmodernism, as well as where they differ from postmodernism. The next section situates poststructuralism by exploring its antecedents, which is useful as an introduction to the problems posed in Chapter Three.

As poststructuralism developed out of a critique of structuralism it shares some similarities.²⁰ First, structuralists and poststructuralists both critique the Cartesian construction of the subject or humanism in general, although they take this critique in different directions. For instance, when addressing literary concerns, Barthes (in his structuralist phase) and Derrida (as a poststructuralist) question the function of the author. Second, Foucault, a structuralist, and Derrida, again as a poststructuralist, both critique notions of historical progress. Foucault's genealogical critique of history, for instance, challenged the linear representation of historical events as taken to represent humanity's progress towards perfection. Third, Barthes and Foucault share with Derrida the critique of the role of language and how meaning is made. Following Saussure's work on the distinction between the signifier and the signified,²¹ Derrida developed the distinction between signifier and signified by advocating "a system of floating signifiers pure and simple, with no determinable relation to any extra-linguistic referents at all" (Sarup 1989, p 3). Fourth, both structuralism and poststructuralism critique the status of philosophy itself within a hierarchy of Enlightenment derived disciplines. For example, Derrida's work opposes the aggrandizing of philosophy over literature and other forms of writing.

Historically, from a more material plane of reference it could be argued that two significant phases – the events of May 1968²² and to a lesser extent the subsequent (literal) death of several notable structuralist theorists between 1979 and 1981 (see Table 1 below) – marked the 'end' of structuralism. Philosophers, like Derrida and

²⁰ See Sarup (1989, p 1-3) for a detailed account of these similarities.

²¹ While Saussure did the pioneering work (1907-1911) on language, it was not until the 1960s to 1970s that its influence was felt (Rice and Waugh 1992, p 22).

²² For the purpose of this chapter, 'May 1968' refers to the general strike in France by students and factory workers in May 1968. By June 1968, the Gaullist government re-established order – students were told that they could take part in university reforms and the workers were given higher wages and a shorter working week. Many intellectuals saw the ease and speed with which the government settled this uprising as a testament to the failure of progressive Marxist/socialist theories and philosophies of the day as insufficiently radical.

Foucault, wrote in the context of the events surrounding May 1968 and the subsequent death or demise of important theorists.

Table 1: Death or Demise of Significant Structuralist Theorists

Theorist	Mode of 'Death'	Date
Nikos Poulantzis	Suicide	October 1979
Jacques Lacan	Dissolved school of psychoanalysis	March 1980
Jean-Paul Sartre	Died	April 1980
Roland Barthes	Died	April 1980
Louis Althusser	Institutionalised	November 1980 (Died 1990)
Jacques Lacan	Died	September 1981

While the above table is interesting, it would be rather naive to suggest that the end of structuralism could be so easily accounted for, especially given that socialism's relevance outlasted the death of its key theorists as well as many critical moments in history, including the fall of the Berlin Wall. Or indeed, that with the demise of structuralist theorists (post 1980), structuralism has ended and a new era of poststructuralism begun.

For structuralists, following Ferdinand de Saussure (and Roland Jacobson who extended the signifier and signified relation to include metaphor and metonymy), language acts as a foundation for theoretical observations, whereas poststructuralists are critical of the presumed unity of the Saussurean sign.²³ Structuralists undermine the ontological assumption of unitary being by claiming that “the manifest appearance of phenomena [are] underpinned and made possible by underlying systems and structures” (Rice and Waugh 1992, p 5).

²³ Literary Structuralism is usually represented by the work of theorists such as Roland Barthes (see, for example, Barthes 1977), Umberto Eco (see, for example, Eco 1979), Tzvetan Todorov (see, for example, Todorov 1982), and A.J. Greimas (see, for example, Greimas 1987). Structuralism also emerged in dialogue with and in opposition to phenomenology. Phenomenology, says Culler, sought to move beyond the philosophical dilemma of the subject/object and consciousness/world splits by “focussing on the phenomenal reality of objects as they appear to consciousness” (Culler 1997, p 124). This line of thought, claims Culler, led to the development of reader response theories (Culler 1997, p 124).

The key concepts that are influential in structuralist theory include: Saussure's system of language, Roland Barthes' development of language as culturally constructed, and Claude Lévi-Strauss' kinship structures.²⁴ A brief description of each is necessary in order to lay the foundations for exploring the significant intersections between feminism and deconstruction.

Saussure defined language as a system of signs. He wanted to understand how language produces meaning. According to Saussure, all signs are the product of two aspects: a signifier and signified (Thwaites et al. 1994, p 27-31). Each sign has a visual or sound element (the signifier) and, attached to it, an idea, image or concept (the signified) (Saussure 1983 [1916], p 67). The connection between sign and referent is quite arbitrary; hence the signs 'dog', 'σκυλος', and 'carne' all refer to the same referent – the actual animal. A radical perception follows from this: namely, it puts into question the unmediated givenness of 'the real' (Saussure 1983 [1916], p 66). 'The real' does not exist because it is always mediated by language/signs, which is expressed through the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Reality does not endow language with meaning, but rather our system of language is the means by which we are able to make sense of the world (Morris 1993, p 101). In other words, Saussure demonstrated that "a gap exists between words and the world; meaning is an effect produced by language, and language produces meaning only as a *system of difference*" (Morris 1993, p 116). The meaning of words does not belong in any positive intrinsic quality they possess, but in their difference from other words (for example, a dog is a dog because it is not 'dot' or a 'tog'. Thus, Saussure claimed that a linguist's task should be to "investigate the structures which govern the differential relation between the constituent elements of language" (Johnson 1977, p 5). Chapter Three explores the Saussurean sign in relation to deconstruction.

Roland Barthes, in his early structuralist phase, further developed Saussure's understanding of the signifier and the signified. Barthes argued that a signifier can have several signifieds, thereby rejecting the claim that a text has one correct or fixed

²⁴ As stated above it is difficult to draw lines between structuralism and post-structuralism. Some theorists like Barthes and Lacan made contributions to both schools. See Sarup (1993) for more details. See Barthes' later work, especially *S/Z* (1990), for an example of writing addressing poststructural questions.

meaning. His famous essay 'The Death of the Author' illustrates this point. Barthes states:

a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. ... the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any of them (Barthes 1992, p 116-117).

According to Barthes, "it is language which speaks, not the author" (Barthes 1992, p 115). This is significant, as Bowie explains, because "this radicalisation made visible formerly hidden links between theoretical reflection on literary interpretation and central issues in modern European philosophy" (Bowie 1989, p ix). Barthes' work focused on the way in which hegemonic discourses or ideologies are presented as 'natural' or inevitable by concealing the way in which power or 'truth' plays a part in their construction (Culler 1997, p 44). In his early work Barthes claimed it was possible to reveal the processes which conceal these 'truths' by investigating their "underlying cultural conventions and their social implications" (Culler 1997, p 44). Moreover, he argued that "the structures that governed literary texts were related to the power structures of society" (Newton 1992, p 42). However, in his later works Barthes moved beyond this critique towards poststructural concerns, especially in *The Pleasure of the Text* (Barthes 1975).

Structuralists were not interested in describing experience; rather, they wanted to highlight the underlying structures that made experience possible. This aspect of the structuralist project is best understood through the work of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. He suggested that meaning (or truth) could be acquired by looking for standard and unchanging structures, or formal universals, which reflect the nature of society. Lévi-Strauss identified patterns in texts by charting the axes of synchronic and diachronic relations between elements in the texts (that acknowledged kinship structures, for example, or illustrated the nature-culture split), which could then be used to reveal the truth (underlying structures of a particular society) (Lévi-Strauss 1972, p 211). Thus, structuralist anthropologists would be required to look for patterns in texts (or kinship structures), which could then be used to reveal the truth of a particular text (or society).

Lèvi-Strauss argued that primitive kinship structures, mythologies and other cultural artefacts could be 'read' as a kind of language. This would involve "breaking down its story into the shortest possible sentences" (Lévi-Strauss 1972, p 211). He claimed that cultural phenomena have hidden structural codes "and that these structures are members of a limited class of formal possibilities" (Turner 1983, p 189). Further, these internal structural codes do not rely on historical connections; rather they are located in the relationship of difference between binary oppositions. That is, he supported Saussure's claim that there are no common universal signifieds, "only symbolic systems of signifiers, each dependant for its meaning on its position within a given system of reference" (Sellers 1991b, p 3). Christopher Norris states:

Lèvi-Strauss rests his analyses of myth and ritual on the conviction that, behind all the surface varieties thrown up by the world's different cultures, there exists certain deep regularities and patterns which reveal themselves to structural investigation. It is a matter of looking beyond their manifest content to the structures of symbolic opposition and sequence that organize these various narratives (Norris 1991, p 37).

Lacan applied Levi-Strauss' structural framework to psychoanalysis. In psychoanalysis, for example, Lacan, following Levi-Strauss, posited that the unconscious is structured like a language (Lacan 1977, p 159, 298). Lacan argued that "the arbitrary nature of the sign removes it from conscious human control", thereby giving it a life of its own (Nye 1988, p 180). However, the discourse of the unconscious is mediated through consciousness, where its meaning must be deciphered by the psychoanalyst. Lacan, according to Elizabeth Grosz, demonstrated that "if the 'unconscious is structured like a language', then it is plausible to claim that linguistics and semiotics are necessary for an understanding of the unconscious" (Grosz 1990c, p 92).

While sharing the abovementioned similarities, there are some significant differences between poststructuralism and structuralism that need clarification. Poststructuralists like Derrida draw on the insights of structural linguistics, they reject some key tenets of structuralism, for instance that patterns are universal or that binary oppositions – like black/white – order the world. Instead, poststructuralists recognize the irreducible excess of language as a multiple play of meanings. Thus, unlike most structuralists, poststructuralists question the appropriateness, or possibility, of locating the truth or ultimate meaning of any event. In other words, structuralists

tend to assume or believe that structures of kinship, the subconscious and so on are universal, rather than changing over time. They also focus on meaning being created through binary oppositions. These issues will be taken up in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Poststructuralists, like Derrida, draw on and respond to the philosophical trajectories outlined above. In particular, they address questions that arose out of the critique of structuralism, particularly the critique of the work of Lévi-Strauss, Saussure, Barthes and Jacques Lacan.²⁵ Eric Matthews suggests that poststructuralism is the main informing philosophy for the more general intellectual movement referred to as postmodernism (Matthews 1996, p 157-58). It is this more general term postmodernism that will now be considered.

According to feminist critics, like Sara Ahmed, it is popular to begin with Jean-François Lyotard's famous book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Lyotard 1984), when discussing the postmodern.²⁶ Lyotard is one of the very few critics who have attempted to theorize the postmodern, and, as such, his work demands attention. Ahmed states that Lyotard's text has become "one of the primary articulations of postmodern theory" (Ahmed 1998, p 9). As she notes, 'catchphrases' from Lyotard's work such as "postmodernism is a crisis of legitimation", or "postmodernism is the end of metanarratives", are often cited as definitions of postmodernism (Ahmed 1998, p 9).

²⁵ Structuralism also emerged in dialogue with and in opposition to phenomenology. Phenomenology, says Culler, sought to move beyond the philosophical dilemma of the subject/object and consciousness/world splits by "focussing on the phenomenal reality of objects as they appear to consciousness" (Culler 1997, p 124). This line of thought, claims Culler, led to the development of reader response theories (Culler 1997, p 124).

²⁶ This thesis does not distinguish between the terms postmodernity and postmodernism, however, according to Linda Hutcheon:

The debate about postmodernity – and the confusion with postmodernism – seems to have begun with the exchange on the topic of modernity between Jürgen Habermas and Jean-François Lyotard. Both agreed that modernity could not be separated from notions of unity and universality or what Lyotard dubbed 'metanarratives'. Habermas argued that the project of modernity, rooted in the context of Enlightenment rationality, was still unfinished and required completion; Lyotard countered with the view that modernity has actually been liquidated by history ... therefore, for Lyotard, postmodernity is characterized by no grand and totalizing narrative, but by smaller and multiple narratives which seek no universalizing stabilization or legitimation (Hutcheon 1989, p 24).

For Lyotard, the postmodern is concerned with the changing nature of knowledge, especially in the sciences. In particular, he claims that, due to advances in information technologies, western capitalist societies are now trading in 'knowledge' (Lyotard 1994). Therefore, Lyotard rejects the notion that one theory or metanarrative (like Marxism) can provide an adequate explanation for the varied and often contradictory aspects of contemporary life. According to Lyotard, many factors contribute to the conditions of possibility which fashion contemporary society as postmodern.

The term 'postmodernism' is also associated with shifts in western art and architecture from around the 1940s and 1950s. In particular, it characterises the revolt against signification and authority and the move towards pastiche and parody (Megill 1985, p 263). In other words, postmodernism signifies the recent aesthetic developments in the arts and architecture where meaning, beauty, and truth are troubled.²⁷ As Eric Matthews claims, 'post-modernism'

is a very vague term which can be used to cover a variety of rather different developments and ideas, in society and the arts as well as in philosophy proper, which do not always seem to have much of a connection with each other. Indeed, it seems to have been first used in relation to the arts, and only later entered into philosophy. ... In so far as it is possible to give it a precise philosophical sense, it refers to the movement which seeks to go beyond the philosophical inheritance of the Enlightenment and the cultural attitudes and values which have been supported by that inheritance (Matthews 1996, p 179-80).

Furthermore, Matthews makes the important point that

'Post-modernism' is a concept which straddles the gap between empirical sociological description and philosophical interpretation (and that ... may be the source of most of the problems in the concept). ... Philosophy plays a part, both in helping to provide the *explanation* for these changes and in giving reason for thinking that there is a *justification* for them in the inadequacies of modernist thought (Matthews 1996, p 180-81, author's emphasis).

Thus, postmodernism is a general term used to describe aspects of contemporary society. It is a term that is loosely applied to almost any theory (constellation or project) which challenges Enlightenment assumptions, especially in reference to

²⁷According to Megill:

Postmodernism ... has consistently called into question the distinction between 'art' and 'reality'. Works of art in the postmodern mode demonstrate an ontological concern, continually asking what it is to be a sculpture, a play, a novel, a painting (1985, p 263).

rationality, unitary subjectivity, representation, the aesthetic, and so on.²⁸ Therefore, by using these very general criteria, most contemporary theorists can be labelled as postmodern. Certainly, according to Sarup, “poststructuralists like Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard are postmodernists” (Sarup 1993, p 144). However, whether Derrida’s deconstruction is adequately positioned within the postmodern is a contested proposition. While some critics firmly situate Derrida within the postmodern others reject the postmodern label in reference to his work. According to Megill, “Derrida ... is not a postmodernist. But he nonetheless has close affinities with the whole postmodern trend in contemporary art” (Megill 1985, p 263). Not surprisingly, Derrida shrewdly maintains that he is

reluctant to say that Deconstruction is Modern or Post-Modern, or anti-Modern, or anti-Post-Modern. I [Derrida] wouldn’t want to say that what is Deconstructive, if there is such a thing, is specifically Modern or Post-Modern. So we have to be very careful with the use of these epithets (Derrida 1989a, p 11).

Given the very general definition of postmodernism there are those who argue that some types of feminisms are postmodern. More specifically, there are feminists who align themselves with postmodern theory and produce a postmodern feminism and therefore argue that feminism “belongs to the terrain of postmodern philosophy” (Nicholson 1990, p 6). Postmodern feminists include those feminists who critique the Enlightenment legacies such as rationality, agency and unified subjectivity, which are essential for normative masculinity.

Joan Scott, a feminist historian, argued for an alliance between feminism and postmodern theory. Scott was instrumental in introducing deconstruction into the social sciences, indicating that history, as a discipline and a discourse, is structured around the presumption of masculine authority. Moreover, she challenged assumptions of unified subjectivity, autonomy and agency by defining ‘experience’ as discursively constituted (Scott 1992). According to Scott “we [feminists] need theory that will be relevant for political practice. It seems to me that the body of theory referred to as postmodernism best meets all these requirements” (Scott 1988,

²⁸ For Lyotard:

The postmodern would be that which puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable (Lyotard 1996, p 142).

p 33). Jane Flax also maintains that feminist “theorists enter into and echo postmodernist discourse” (Flax 1990, p 42). Indeed, according to Stacey Young, postmodernism’s focus on antiessentialism, rejection of universals, and the characterization of power “through discursive production” forms the basis of “a ‘natural alliance’ between feminism and postmodernism” (Young 1997, p 21).

The term postmodernism is useful in this very limited sense. In the above examples, for instance, Scott and Flax place feminism within the postmodern field in order to make some general comments about feminism and to distinguish feminism from the Enlightenment humanist tradition. Thus, it can be argued that in some very particular instances postmodernism and poststructuralism might be conflated. However, in most cases to collapse the differences is misleading (Kincheloe and McLaren 1994, p 143). That is to say, the term postmodern is meaningless when engaging in particular arguments that rely on an understanding and acknowledgment of certain philosophical trajectories or traditions.

By way of summing up the distinctions between postmodernism and poststructuralism a significant difference needs to be highlighted. It is reasonable to say that both poststructuralism and postmodernism developed out of a crisis within modernism itself. This crisis occurred on both a cultural and political level. However, according to Marshall, a key difference between postmodernism and poststructuralism is the role of (or preoccupation with) language, not just language but language as discourse (from Foucault). Marshall states that “poststructuralists share an interest in the constituting aspects of language – how it defines us as much as we define it; how it precedes our awareness of it, so that we are born into and thus shaped by the language which we like to think we control” (Marshall 1992, p 7).

Integral to the structuralist, and therefore poststructuralist, project is a preoccupation with the underlying structures of language. Derrida, Saussure, Lévi-Strauss and Lacan are all involved in theorizing language as it mediates ‘reality’. Disparate disciplines such as anthropology, psychoanalysis and linguistics are brought together by this common understanding. As Derrida points out, the crossing over of disciplines is inevitable when considering questions raised by structuralist thinking. Indeed, deconstruction accepts that language as discourse constitutes meaning and

analyses *how it operates*, for example through binary oppositions (asymmetrical relations) that can be overturned to reveal contradiction—what is excessive, absent and so on. These concepts will be taken up in Chapter Three.

In addition, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, among others, focus on language as the key to understanding ‘the feminine’ beyond masculine frameworks. Irigaray contends that, until recently, women’s writing (*écriture féminine*) has been absent rather than invisible, as “there has only been one voice, a male voice [for men and women] which women writers of the past obligatorily imitated. Therefore, the repression of the feminine (in women and in men) was total” (Marks 1978, p 836). Poststructuralist feminism surfaced *mainly* out of a critique of a western ‘philosophical tradition’ which, as these feminist philosophers maintain, privileges ‘the masculine’ (Sellers 1991b).²⁹ According to Kristeva, poststructuralist feminists are “essentially interested in the specificity of female psychology and its symbolic realizations” (Kristeva 1986, p 194). She continues, “these women [referring to theorists like Irigaray and Cixous] seek to give a language to the intrasubjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture in the past” (Kristeva 1986, p 194). Finding a language that can express ‘intrasubjective and corporeal experiences’ is critical to Irigaray’s project. Thus, Irigaray stresses that the psychological subject cannot be explicated from the grammatical or textual subject. Both Derrida and Irigaray view language as the vehicle for changing the way in which subjects are coded as male or female.³⁰ An appreciation of the way in which poststructuralists like Derrida and Irigaray conceive of language is critical to understanding their enterprise, and this will be pursued in Chapter Three.

²⁹ Irigaray deconstructs the work of major theorists including Nietzsche and Freud, see Irigaray (1985b; 1989).

³⁰ In other words, for poststructuralists, language organises the known world. Threadgold states that: Language or any other semiotic system is not a set of forms with meanings attached. It is a set of complex, evolved, evolving and open semiotic systems where meanings are realised in and constructed through complex material media, in contradictory and overlapping institutional sites, by sexually, socially and historically positioned speaking subjects, who are subjected to and constructed in and through signifying networks of power and desire (Threadgold 1990, p 14).

Conclusion

This discussion highlights the ambivalent relationship that some feminists have with philosophy in general, criticising philosophy as either presently or irredeemably masculinist, or maintaining a critical (even suspicious) attitude toward the poststructuralist turn in philosophy. However, it is more than worthwhile for feminists to strive to break down the artificial barriers between philosophy and feminism as philosophy pervades all aspects of life. For feminism, philosophy has many roles; perhaps the most obvious is the scrutiny and vigilance of practices for assumptions that are not explicit, for example Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile*, a treatise on the education of boys and girls, assumes that Emile's (a boy's) education and Sophie's (a girl's) education ought to be different (Rousseau 1955 [1773]). However, close examination reveals that Rousseau gives no justification for the difference except that it reflects society at the time. He does not even argue that girls' and boys' learning capabilities are inherently different. Rousseau's theory on the education of boys and girls was influential in schooling systems across England and Europe until it was challenged by feminist critics. Thus, feminism's link with philosophy is essential for interrogating and understanding the way in which subject positions are constructed. However, the consequences of a feminism that only engages superficially (or as a corrective) with philosophy are manifold: the most obvious being a failure to appreciate the fact that all positions are derived from philosophical perspectives (not always acknowledged), which in most cases support underlying masculine biases and prerogatives. Luce Irigaray said, "we need to psychoanalyse philosophy, look for repressions, absences and silences" because philosophy is a 'discourse on discourse' (Irigaray, cited in Sellers 1991b, p 24). In other words, Irigaray is suggesting that feminists pay special attention to the language of philosophy as it sets the law for other discourses. Indeed, as philosophies are narratives that try to organize the world, feminists need to offer alternative narratives as well as highlighting the problems with existing theories. It is within this context that an argument is put forward in this thesis for a partnership between deconstruction and feminism.

Through an analysis of the differences between the key philosophical terms of structuralism, postmodernism and poststructuralism, this chapter has argued that feminism has much to gain from a philosophising which generates ideas and offers

knowledges even if their own sets of truths require interrogation. A deconstructive philosophy is tied to an ethics that is imperative, which contains political/practical injunctions, especially given that no theory is disinterested. In terms of feminist struggles, deconstruction offers feminism a tool for analysing (deconstructing) theory, a new way of thinking about the world (challenging binary thinking), and through these processes a way of imagining a future that contains the feminine as well as the masculine. Drucilla Cornell states that:

the politics of feminism needs its poetry for the redefinition of the goal of feminist politics, and indeed, of the very content of politics itself. Politics is now only the struggle for survival within patriarchy, as important as that struggle obviously is, but also the struggle through the dream for a new world, a different future (Cornell 1991, p 186).

A definition of deconstruction might seem pertinent here. However, as is shown in Chapters Two and Three, deconstruction is difficult to define in a sentence or two. To define deconstruction is to fix its meaning and thus limit its possibilities. Rather, this thesis attempts to show what deconstruction might look like when applied to specific feminist issues, like subjectivity. Luce Irigaray's work on the feminine symbolic is a good example of deconstruction in practice. Thus, *écriture féminine* is discussed throughout the thesis. However, Chapters Two and Three offer a 'definition' of deconstruction in as much as it is possible to define this theory.

This discussion has addressed many of the themes that will be taken up throughout the thesis. It has outlined (very briefly) some of the key issues that feminist theorists engage with when they take up debates about the 'value' of poststructuralism for a feminist politics. As the next two chapters indicate, many feminists' voices in the debate misconstrue or misunderstand these concepts. The thesis contends, then, that it is important to look again at key terms and highlight the differences between postmodernism and poststructuralism in order to engage in serious debate about the usefulness of deconstruction. Moreover, different philosophical positions offer specific trajectories for feminist theory, each with possibilities and limitations – thus it is important to acknowledge each and to critique them within their specific frameworks. This chapter focused on the intersection between poststructuralism and feminism, and hence the importance of distinguishing between these related terms here.

Chapter 2: The ‘Subject’ of Feminism

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.

Simone de Beauvoir (1972 [1949], p 295)

Once we realized that there is no universal *man*, but only culturally different men and women, then ‘man’s’ eternal companion – ‘woman’ – also disappeared.

Sandra Harding (1997, p 163)

[woman] does *not* exist with a capital ‘W’.

Julia Kristeva (1986, p 205)

Introduction

Feminism in the twentieth century carries the legacy of Enlightenment thought, or what Michèle Barrett calls “philosophical ‘liberalism’: the doctrine of *rationalism* and the ‘*Cartesian*’ concept of a human subject” (Barrett 1992, p 207, author’s emphasis). The ‘crisis’ within feminism post-1968 revolved around these two issues, in particular the questioning of rationalism and the usefulness of the Cartesian subject. This chapter critiques humanism and Enlightenment precedents for deconstruction, via feminist discussions of the subject.

Over the last century, the ‘Cartesian concept of the human subject’ has dominated feminist theories of subjectivity. The conditions that made (and make) the Cartesian type of subject possible, even desirable, are discussed in this chapter, which shows how repeated (failed) feminist attempts to work with this construction of subjectivity (self-representation through the Cartesian subject) inevitably precipitated the move in feminist theory towards poststructural understandings of the ‘subject’.

Currently, poststructuralism’s challenge to the unified, rational and autonomous subject of modernism, or the Cartesian subject, is a critical point of contention

among feminists.³¹ Feminists have identified several problems associated with the demise of the Cartesian subject. For instance, some feminists like Linda Alcoff and Seyla Benhabib believe that the tensions and contradictions that stem from dismantling the Cartesian subject are irreconcilable with feminist theory.³² While they pose a variety of reasons for this irreconcilability, in the main, objections centre on what they describe as the loss of political agency or efficacy, which, they argue, is crucial to feminist theory and the feminist movement.³³ Indeed, this thesis argues that the perceived loss of political efficacy is one of the most significant reasons for feminist antipathy towards poststructuralism.³⁴ Moreover, feminists who remain fixed in particular philosophical models – such as critical theory³⁵ – have trouble conceiving of political change without a Cartesian style subject.

An identity politics is certainly undermined by a deconstructive approach. Politics in this framework is seen to be impossible without subjects who act collectively (uniting against a common struggle), against patriarchy, for instance (Elam 1994). Within this paradigm, for feminists to become political subjects they need to understand the subject in terms of an identity based on similarities, that is, one that does not recognize contradictions. This chapter shows that the adoption of poststructuralist understandings of subjectivity allows for difference while engaging with political issues in a productive dialogue. Deconstruction cautions one to

³¹ Feminism has a history of alliances with many political and philosophical positions, including liberalism, Marxism, socialism, existentialism, and psychoanalysis. In this chapter, reference is made to all of these schools of thought where appropriate; however, the focus is on liberalism as it is the most relevant in discussions of subjectivity.

³² While there are similarities between these theorists there are also some marked differences. Nevertheless the differences are inconsequential to this line of argument. For a discussion of differences see Alcoff (1988) and Benhabib (1991).

³³ For instance Alcoff states “[poststructuralism] limits feminism to the negative tactics of reaction and deconstruction and endangers the attack against classical liberalism by discrediting the notion of an epistemologically significant, specific subjectivity” (Alcoff 1988, p 421); and Benhabib argues for the retention of the subject, for without it how would “the very project of female emancipation ... be thinkable?” (Benhabib 1991, p 140). Even so, Benhabib recognizes that there are problems with the Enlightenment project, that is to say, she does not wish to rescue the Cartesian subject as “he” is constituted through modernity. Instead she argues that this subject should be reconstituted, not abandoned.

³⁴ In regard to the poststructural project in general, most feminists concur with poststructuralism’s attack on rationalism, although there is dissension about whether the critique should begin with the Enlightenment or whether it is necessary to review Western thought dating back to Plato (sovereignty of mind over body). For a detailed discussion, see Hekman (1994).

³⁵ ‘Critical Theory’ is a term used for any social theory that relies on a scientific approach to explain oppression or social injustice. The main difference between critical theories and positivist theories is that the former is self-reflexive in its endeavour towards emancipation.

recognize how difficult it is to move forward without retaining the logic of modernity, yet it complicates the pragmatic dimensions of politics and social life within philosophical conundrums. For instance, one way it does this is by encouraging feminists to think beyond concepts like gender and identity, thus

feminism would no longer be the affirmation of women, women's issues or women's identity, but would in its criticism of conventional maleness, identity and power, take the criticism of essentialism to include all forms of supposed naturalness, distinct kinds or stable norms (Colebrook 2004, p 85).

Another important factor in the debates between poststructuralist feminists and modernist feminists, for example the debate between Butler and Benhabib concerning the retention or not of the Cartesian subject, is how this construction of subjectivity deals with issues of sexual difference. Indeed it is out of the crisis over sexual difference, wrote Alice Jardine, that poststructuralism emerged – of which contemporary French theory is at the centre (Jardine 1985, p 25). Moreover, while there is considerable debate about whether feminism is a postmodernism or whether feminism should be associated with postmodernism, as noted in Chapter One, political theorists, like Seyla Benhabib, recognize, even if somewhat reluctantly, that an “elective affinity” certainly exists between feminism and postmodernism (Benhabib 1992, p 213). The most important of these affinities is an interest in how the Cartesian subject acts as a sexed subject. It is for these reasons that this chapter also traces how certain aspects of feminist theory have modified, transformed or abandoned the Cartesian constructions of the subject, in order to best represent sexual differences.

To situate this argument, elucidation of the Cartesian subject is necessary, as it is important to understand how this notion of subjectivity, as unified and rational, came to be the (dominant) standard, or norm, from which feminism worked.

The Cartesian subject was named after Rène Descartes (1596-1650), the forefather of the humanist declaration that ‘man’³⁶ is the centre of meaning. Descartes is said to have come to this realization when, in a quest for foundational knowledge, he undertook a systematic critique of all that he knew, or thought he knew. After an

³⁶ The use of the term ‘man’ is intentional.

extensive process of elimination, he concluded that the only thing he could be absolutely sure of, was that he was thinking (or doubting), hence *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) (Descartes 1968 [1637], p 53-54). Thus, according to Descartes, if man uses his intellect or reasoning (a gift from God), in a scientific and systematic manner, he can avoid making errors and thereby get closer to the Truth (Russell 1979 [1946], p 542-551). The will to truth is an important aspect of the construction of this subject. In addition, Descartes' distrust of the senses, and hence the body, led him to distinguish between the mind and the body. In this dualism or binary the mind is accorded superiority. The body must be transcended for pure thought to be made possible. Genevieve Lloyd sums up the impact of this legacy:

We owe to Descartes an influential and pervasive theory of mind, which provides support for a powerful version of the sexual division of labor. Women have been assigned responsibility for that realm of the sensuous which the Cartesian Man of Reason must transcend, if he is to have true knowledge of things (Lloyd 1984, p 50).

Even though Descartes' work is the most cited in relation to this type of subject, the knowing subject pre-dates Descartes. As Derrida states, western metaphysical thinking, of which the knowing subject is a part, is structured on a 'metaphysics of presence'.³⁷ This model works on the assumption that the thinking subject can know an object; indeed, that thinking subjects can know or understand other subjects. In addition, the metaphysics of presence relies on the notion that the subject can understand an object as it corresponds to reality, and accepts that this representation is a depiction of it as a whole, a system (Young 1986, p 2).

Western thought has a tendency (since Aristotle) to organise things into units, systems, or categories.³⁸ For a category to be unified, or complete, certain elements must necessarily be excluded. The perimeters of these groups are loosely held in place by an insider/outsider distinction. Consequently, policing boundaries (inclusion/exclusion) is a key component of this (Cartesian) type of subjectivity. Thus, the demarcation of boundaries is an imperative of this construct. Its status as a knowing (rational) subject with a will to truth and knowledge can only be maintained through inclusion and exclusion.

³⁷ Metaphysics is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

³⁸ Aristotle classified logical thinking into three distinct 'laws of thought'. These include: 'the law of non-contradiction' (nothing can both be and not be at the same time and in the same respect); 'the law of the excluded middle' (something either is or is not); and 'the law of identity' (something is what it is) (Miller 1993, p 23).

In order to sustain this way of thinking (metaphysics of presence) the construction of a number of mutually exclusive oppositions have been formalized. These oppositions, or binaries, have been instrumental in shaping entire (western) philosophies. Derrida states that these oppositions are not natural but a “violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand” (Derrida 1981a, p 41). It is no accident of history that one term of a binary is privileged over the other. Significantly, the first term in these binaries is privileged (or dominant) because it represents presence, the unified, and the self-identical. The Cartesian construction of the sovereign subject epitomises or personifies these qualities. The second term is subordinate as it is defined as unformed, transforming and chaotic; it represents the ‘other’, and absence. For example:

<i>Desirable</i>	<i>Undesirable</i>
Presence	Absence
<i>Subject</i>	<i>Object</i>
<i>Man</i>	<i>Woman</i>
<i>Mind</i>	<i>Body</i>
<i>Inside</i>	<i>Outside</i>
<i>Self</i>	<i>Other</i>
<i>Speech</i>	<i>Writing</i>
<i>Philosophy</i>	<i>Sophistry</i>

In other words, these binaries, based on the logic of non-contradiction (Aristotle), organize the world into hierarchical dichotomies. The establishment of a ‘Man of Reason’, or a sovereign subject, as unified, autonomous, and rational has dominated western philosophy for centuries.

Without doubt feminists have had to address difficult questions regarding the constitution, and, more recently, the status of the ‘subject’ of feminism. Generally speaking, the ‘subject’ that has been galvanised by recent feminist theory can, in the main, be attributed to three competing assumptions.³⁹ The first assumption is that feminism should adopt a model that advocates equality (with men). This model assumes that equality with men is an appropriate goal for women, for instance, the

³⁹ For a detailed discussion see Braidotti (1991, p 157) and Fraser (1996).

work of Mary Wollstonecraft and later Simone de Beauvoir fit into this category (Beauvoir 1972 [1949]; Wollstonecraft 1974 [1792]). The subject of this model is constructed to emphasise the differences between men in general and women in general and is sometimes referred to as 'equality feminism'. This type of feminism relies on an identity politics, that is, a politics that unites under a common category, in this case gender (sisterhood theories).

The second model assumes that the subject of feminism needs to reflect the differences *among* women as well as their difference from men. This model is referred to as 'difference feminism' or 'cultural feminism'. For some feminists difference is deployed in two distinct ways: difference between women and difference between men and women. One strand of difference feminism tends to constitute a homogenous female subject different from men and does not attend to internal differences. For instance, Carol Gilligan has been criticised for only valorising the difference of women from men and not adequately addressing internal differences. Another strand of difference feminism recognizes that theories that use woman as a homogenous category are too vague and have a tendency to exclude many women. Nevertheless, political action for difference feminism, whether based on differences between women or difference from men, usually relies on mobilizing around similarities between women.

Finally the third model suggests that feminism should be sceptical of any fixed, or predetermined, constructions of subjectivity. This is referred to as 'deconstruction feminism'. The main distinction between the cultural/difference model and the deconstruction model is that the cultural/difference feminists promote a subject which has an identity based around the similarities between women, a type of subject modelled on the Cartesian subject. By contrast the deconstructionists claim that feminism does not require a construction of subjectivity based on the Cartesian model, as this type of subject is necessarily (inherently) flawed and exclusionary. According to Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, another way of understanding the difference between these three models is to view them as "a productive tension between essentialist, constructivist, and deconstructivist understandings of gendered subjectivity" (Kemp and Squires 1997, p 216).

It would be misleading to suggest that each of these models is a development of a previous phase which is then abandoned or superseded. Indeed, each of these theories of subjectivity is vibrant and prevalent in contemporary debates.⁴⁰ Central to the debates around subjectivity are at least three factors: how to account for sexual difference; the possibility for resistance; and the question of agency (Hekman 1991, p 58). The following section outlines some of the representative arguments (for and against) in each model before analysing the points of convergence. The aim is to give a broad outline of each model rather than engage in a detailed account. By way of focusing this trajectory, comparison of the three models will concentrate on addressing, or at least touching on, issues of sexual difference, resistance and agency.

Identity Politics Feminism

Identity politics is premised on a belief in the essential identity of women.⁴¹ Women are seen to share common characteristics, which are universal. Based on these similarities it is then deemed to be sufficient to speak for, or on behalf of, all women. Identity politics has been the vehicle deployed by many feminists, who espoused a variety of philosophical positions to challenge and critique western political and philosophical culture (for example, Wollstonecraft (1794 [1792]); Taylor, (1970 [1851]); Woolf, (1929); de Beauvoir, (1972 [1949])). For these feminists inequality exists because of structural inequalities which have been inflicted on women. Equality feminists insist that white male structural biases need to be identified as such and not masked under the pretext of universal 'man'. They question the exclusion of women from the construction of a subject that benefits only man. Moreover, they are sceptical of the supposed neutrality of discourses. In other words, as Jean Bethke Elshtain (1981) and later Genevieve Lloyd (1984) note, 'reason' could be used equally for and against women.

This position suggests that there are certain culturally enforced assumptions that affect all women, for instance the denial of an (equal) education. These cultural assumptions act to exclude woman from the public sphere (and severely limit her

⁴⁰ Chapter 4 gives some indication of the overlapping presence of the current debates in Australian feminism which reflect the three models discussed in this chapter.

⁴¹ The title 'identity politics' is an explanatory as well as theoretical term that was developed after the fact; most 'identity politics' feminists did not refer to themselves or their theories by this title.

activities in the private sphere) as she is defined in such a way as to make her dependent on man: Woman is constructed as irrational, emotional, hysterical, a body without boundaries. For instance, Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, first published in French in 1949, made an unforgettable and much quoted statement: 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (de Beauvoir 1972 [1949]).⁴² As Braidotti points out, de Beauvoir makes a strong case for the fact "that men have appropriated de jure the faculty of reasonableness, de facto confining women to compulsory irrationality unreasonableness, immanence, and passivity" (Braidotti 1991b, p 159).⁴³

In the main, the common (assumption) aspiration that underpins this type of feminism is a quest for equality, or freedom, in three areas: the political, the economic, and the sexual. Women rallied under the obvious double standard in each of these areas. In nineteenth century feminist thought, there was a focus on the economic and the political. Women as a group united around general injustices (misogynist stereotyping) in order to claim equal access to desirable qualities, such as reason and objectivity. De Beauvoir wanted to show that the qualities associated with the concept woman were fabricated (culturally constructed, an artefact of patriarchy) by a society that benefited from keeping women subordinate, and not because of any natural or essential qualities inherent in being a woman (de Beauvoir 1972 [1949], p 75). In short, according to de Beauvoir, woman could be equal to man if she was presented with the same opportunities. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron state that, for de Beauvoir:

It seems plausible to assume that the difference [between men and women] could be explained by following changes in ideology from the medieval scholastic categories, to humanism, to rationalism, to utopian or scientific socialism, to existentialism (Marks and de Courtivron 1980, p 7-8).

While de Beauvoir challenged philosophical constructions of woman she did so within, or whilst reinscribing, the immanence/transcendence divide which she criticised. In *The Second Sex*, she explicated the inadequacies in existing systems: because women were excluded (de Beauvoir 1972 [1949], p 19-20). She did not, as

⁴² Interestingly, at the time, de Beauvoir did not consider herself a feminist and believed that class struggles should be given preference over gender struggles (de Beauvoir 1977).

⁴³ Hubbard et al (1979, p xviii) also point out that "we came to understand that women's biology not only is not destiny, but is often not biology".

Marks and de Courtivron note, suggest that these ideologies were biased because they were created by men in order to favour men, a sentiment that was strongly advanced by feminists in France after May 1968 (Marks and de Courtivron 1980, p 8).

The quest for equality, when run to its logical limit, produced some very radical results. In 1970, two very influential works were published, Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectics of Sex*, and Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* – closely followed by Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* in 1971. Firestone, in particular, focused on the kind of subject woman would need to become in order for equality and freedom to be achieved. She claimed that:

Unlike economic class, sex class sprang directly from a biological reality: men and women were created differently, and not equally privileged. Although, as de Beauvoir points out, this difference of itself did not necessitate the development of a class system – the domination of one group by another – the productive *functions* of these differences did. The biological family is an inherently unequal power distribution (Firestone 1970, p 8, author's emphasis).

Thus, for Firestone the goal for feminism should be to free woman of her biology. Toward this aim, Firestone advocated the employment of 'artificial reproduction' technologies, which would take over from natural means of conception and pregnancy. In addition, following the socialist position, the community at large would conduct the rearing of children, or what she called the 'socialization of childcare' (Firestone 1970, p 221). In other words the biological family would become obsolete, as children would be the responsibility of the whole community. Consequently, women would be free to participate in civil society without the burden of debilitating biological functions, which she saw as childbearing itself and its associated side-effects including "menstruation, menopause and [other] 'female ills'" (Firestone 1970, p 8). Moreover, due to the anonymity of reproduction and the subsequent socialization of children, woman's feelings of guilt or dependency associated with child-rearing would be erased and, thus, woman could compete equally with man.⁴⁴ Not surprisingly, this type of subject implied the formation of an 'androgynous' subject.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Firestone was not alone in criticising the 'family' as an oppressive structure: see also Oakley (1974) and Barrett and McIntosh (1982).

⁴⁵ See Eisenstein (1984), especially Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion of androgyny and feminism.

Firestone's description of woman's reproductive function as "barbaric," "clumsy [and] inefficient," "tyrannical" and "fundamentally oppressive" (Firestone 1970, pp 198, 206, 225-26, 241), elicited much criticism; especially scathing were Juliet Mitchell and Adrienne Rich.⁴⁶ In what is sometimes characterized as the second wave of feminism, feminists tried to reclaim childbirth/mothering experiences as well as the other sex-specific traits which were rejected by Firestone. Some of these arguments will be revisited later in the chapter. While this thesis wants to acknowledge this very important early feminist work, which influenced the writings of Mary Daly, Nancy Chodorow, and Adrienne Rich, focus needs to be directed onto the kind of subject it evokes. Clearly these feminists support the concept of a rational modernist subject that strives for equality by minimising woman's difference from man.

There are at least two positive and interrelated dimensions to identity politics, namely, solidarity and empowerment. Solidarity offers the potential for an alliance of women, which would act as a strong political force. Furthermore, the potential to empower women, especially those women who were previously isolated and divided, in both the public and private sphere, was seen as ultimately desirable. In addition the political goals of this model could be realized relatively quickly and with visible results. For instance, a liberal feminist position that stressed women's equality with men saw significant gains, especially in work (for example, equal pay),⁴⁷ and education (for example, tertiary degrees).⁴⁸ However, as Nancy Fraser remarks, identity politics is firmly established in an epistemology which assumes

that all women were subordinated to all men in the same way and to the same degree, it had falsely universalised the specific situation of white, middle class heterosexual women and concealed their implication in hierarchies of class, 'race' ethnicity and sexuality (Fraser 1996, p 65).

⁴⁶ While both these feminists were critical of Firestone they came from quite different ideological positions: Mitchell from psychoanalytic feminism, and Rich from radical feminism.

⁴⁷ Equal pay claims are still being fought for and in many cases men still receive more pay for comparable work, but the gap has been narrowed. See Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005, p 150-155) for details.

⁴⁸ Women are out achieving men in education (undergraduate) but not in high status degrees (PhDs) or high paying qualifications (for example in Engineering and Information Technology). In 1949, women constituted about 20 per cent of university undergraduates: now they are 57 per cent (Carrington and Pratt 2003, p 9). See also Department of Education (2003).

Moreover, this type of feminism presupposes a privileged knowledge of what woman really is, and hence, what she really wants. Whereas in the past men had defined women, now women were attempting self-definition – a project fraught with dangers, not least of which is a reliance on problematic epistemological foundations. As mentioned earlier, there is a propensity in western thought to organise things into units, systems, or categories. This logic follows particular rules, namely, that certain elements must necessarily be excluded in order for a category to be unified. According to Jane Flax, maintenance of an identity politics viewpoint “requires the suppression of discourses that threaten to differ with or undermine the authority of the dominant one” (Flax 1987, p 633). Thus, for Flax the suppressions become “a necessary condition for the (apparent) authority, coherence, and universality of our own” group (Flax 1987, p 633). In other words, group identity, by its very nature, is exclusionary. Moreover, the epistemological difficulties inherent in a politics of identity, or indeed a politics of self-representation, is tied to a conservative political project; one that fosters divisions. Significantly this type of subject is limited by other equally pressing identities such as religion, sexuality, nationality, race, class and so on. These competing identities weighed heavily on the Sovereign (equality) subject.

While the equality approach has distinct advantages, mostly political and economic, the disadvantages, for some feminists, outweigh the advantages. Nonetheless, it would be inaccurate to suggest that equality as an ideal or as a platform for political change is obsolete. On the contrary, as Iris Marion Young has shown, ‘identity logic’ is enacted in many modern notions such as ‘impartiality’, and the ‘myth of merit’ (Young 1990, p 10-30, 97-99).

To sum up, the subject that is invoked through an equality discourse is a ‘human’ subject rather than a masculine or feminine subject. Unfortunately it is a (humanist) subject which is marked by masculine or patriarchal culture in such a way as to limit or exclude possibilities for exploring feminine ways of being. As Genevieve Lloyd has shown us, an unexamined human subject is inevitably a construction of a masculine subject (Lloyd 1984, p 92). Moreover, this masculine subject is also a subject that denies or excludes racial, sexual and other differences. This subject is

constructed with reference to categories of sameness and difference – women constructed as being 'almost the same' in an asymmetrical hierarchy.

By the late 1970s to early 1980s, the significance of these exclusions or divisions had impacted on feminism. According to Teresa de Lauretis, texts like *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, published in 1981, contributed to a "shift in feminist consciousness" (De Lauretis 1987, p 10). Clearly, there are certain disadvantages for a feminism that is only interested in egalitarian goals. The need for another agenda, which is by no means less important, was demanded of feminism. As bell hooks, among others, has shown, the quest for an equality politics based on identity (as women) is not the only project or one necessarily desirable for all women (hooks 1982). Hooks describes the situation for black women in the US:

No other group in America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women. We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from black men, or a present part of the larger group 'women' in this culture. ... When black people are talked about the focus tends to be on black men; and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on white women (hooks 1982, p 7).

The assumption within identity politics – commonality of experience – failed to take into account black women's different experience of patriarchal society. Needless to say, a strategic politics that is vigilant and supportive of egalitarian demands to correct economic and political injustices is currently very important to feminism. Indeed, it is precisely this dilemma that feminism is currently struggling with: How to unite, or mobilise, women as a political group without excluding or devaluing particular women's issues?

Difference Feminism

The model of feminism described above is tied to a belief in the possibility of equality between the sexes but it mutes particular differences based on other categories of identity – race, class and sexual orientation in particular. The equality model of feminism, to a certain degree, promotes a (Sovereign female) subject who would have equal participation (with a Sovereign male subject) in society (at all levels) and equal access to social goods. The problems, however, became evident when feminism was called to account for the specificity of its subject – what kind of

subject is being imagined? Quite clearly the imagined subject is a subject which purports to have universal attributes but is shown to be culturally (white, European, middle-class), and sexually (heterosexual) specific.

As the term 'difference' implies, the second model considered is very difficult to represent adequately in such a limited space. Having said that, this section will proceed by introducing some of the key arguments of 'difference' feminism. While it is obvious that, in some cases, these feminists (or feminist positions) have very different agendas, they are united in that they all recognize the need for theorizing a subject that reflects or incorporates 'differences' among women as well as differences from men.

Since the early 1980s, feminists have responded to the realization that women are not a homogenous group in at least two ways: first, by being critical of the subject they were assuming, and second, by questioning the desirability and/or possibility of equality. In particular, critics of the liberal feminist position, like Jean Bethke Elshtain, began to doubt or challenge the notion that women can be like men, want to be like men, or should be like men (Elshtain 1981). Elshtain showed that, by trying to obscure differences, liberal feminists were merely taking the opposite but equally extreme position to the one espoused by the existing (patriarchal) literature. They focused solely on socialization factors and refused to acknowledge any impact of biological differences between men and women. On the contrary, Elshtain stated that feminists ought to closely examine sex-based differences and what impact they have on women's lived experience, rather than denying all biological implications of being a woman (Elshtain 1981, p 252).

For some feminists this different focus resulted in the review and subsequent modifications of the so-called equality subject. In particular, this involved the incorporation and/or consideration of specific factors. For instance, a crucial step for determining how to proceed was to emphasise the value and place of women's experience in understanding women's particularity. For some feminists this project began with reclaiming sex-based differences, such as rethinking women's specific activities like mothering and caregiving. In other words, by reversing the binaries that structure western thinking – at least theoretically – theories were developed

which valued what was previously undesirable. For instance, Carol Gilligan, a former student and later colleague of Lawrence Kohlberg, proposed a most interesting thesis. She claimed that women have a different and particular way of interpreting moral dilemmas which Kohlberg's scale of moral development fails to consider, or, perhaps more importantly, value (Gilligan 1982). Gilligan stressed that current models of moral development are based on the transcendental principle of a justice that privileges male ways of understanding the world. Instead, she suggests that women's moral development be based on an 'ethics of care'. The 'ethics of care' model is intended to complement the 'justice' model as an alternative (possibly better) way of approaching ethical issues. One could say that Gilligan is reinforcing the binary, justice/care, by attributing specific characteristic traits to women and men (but placing greater emphasis on the feminine characteristics). This form of argument, once again reinscribes, or reinvents, the sameness/difference debate. In this case, women's particularity (difference) is being deployed to support the argument equal but different instead of only equal if the same. Virginia Held further developed this model by trying to combine the 'ethics of care' model with the 'justice model', but using the latter to a lesser degree (Held 2001).⁴⁹ Nonetheless, both Gilligan's and Held's theories focus on explaining women's particularity or difference, rather than looking for women's similarity to men.

Turning to differences among women, the consequence of racial and sexual considerations led to significant modifications of the Cartesian subject.⁵⁰ Indeed, as

⁴⁹ For a more detailed explanation see Held (1993).

⁵⁰ Another widespread response to criticisms of the Sovereign subject resonates in the work of Monique Wittig, who is often described as a materialist, lesbian feminist. While Wittig is not Australian, her work has had some impact on Australian feminists' work. Wittig claims that for some lesbians:

[t]he refusal to become (or to remain) heterosexual always meant to refuse to become a man or a woman, consciously or not. For a lesbian this goes further than the refusal of the *role* 'woman'. It is the refusal of the economic, ideological, and political power of a man. ... Thus, some avenues of the feminist and lesbian movement lead us back to the myth of woman which was created by men especially for us, and with it we sink back into a natural group. Having stood up to fight for a sexless society, we now find ourselves entrapped in the familiar deadlock of 'woman is wonderful' (Wittig 1997, p 222).

Wittig rejects the glorification or valorization of patriarchal myths of femininity. While Wittig has some problems with the difference model's agenda, reflected in the above quote, she is not in favour of discarding the premises underlying the Cartesian subject. On the contrary, she claims that what is needed is to "dissociate 'women' (the class within which we fight) from 'woman' the myth" (Wittig 1997, p 223). In other words, what is needed, according to Wittig, is to determine what 'real' women's experience is, as compared to what women are socialized or constructed to be.

Jan Pettman (1992), among others, made clear, a serious awareness of differences would mean that feminists should do more than just ritually (and superficially) invoke racial (or sexual) differences.⁵¹ On the contrary, a complex examination of the relations of power between women (black, migrant, lesbian, working class, and so on) would have to be undertaken. Furthermore, an analysis of power relations between women of colour, lesbians and so forth simply highlighted the fact that each of these categories are no more unitary than the previously and more obviously contentious category 'Woman'.

By way of illuminating the epistemological concerns that came out of this model, and at the risk of reducing or collapsing the particularities, I will draw on Sandra Harding's understanding of 'standpoint' theory. Harding claims that:

For these [standpoint] theorists, knowledge emerges for the oppressed only through the struggles they wage against their oppressors. It is through feminist struggles against male domination that women's experience can be made to yield up a truer (or less false) image of social reality than that available only from the perspective of the social experience of men of the ruling classes and races. Thus a feminist standpoint is not something anyone can have by claiming it, but an achievement. (A standpoint differs in this respect from a perspective.) To achieve a feminist standpoint one must engage in the intellectual and political struggle necessary to see nature and social life from the point of view of that disdained activity which produces women's social experiences instead of from the partial and perverse perspective of the 'ruling gender' experience of men (Harding 1997, p 169).

The result of these debates was to alter the subject invoked so that it reflected racial and sexual differences. This model of feminism is interested in reworking, or in some cases reconstructing, alternative subjects rather than abandoning the concept of a subject *per se*. Critical to the constitution of this subject is agency, that is, a subject that holds the promise of, and potential for, emancipation. However, despite the interventions to displace the Cartesian subject, Michèle Barrett points out that:

Many feminists might regard the shift from 'equality' to 'difference' models of feminism, which has characterized the past decade of western feminism, as a shift of that [paradigmatic] order: on the other hand, one might conceptualise the equality-difference debate as itself a paradigm *within* which either position can be taken without undue strain on the model (Barrett 1992, p 206, author's emphasis).

⁵¹ Jan Pettman states:

Becoming visible is not enough; indeed it may make for more vulnerability, intervention or offence. Those who make even a token effort to include Others when they have done no serious work on their own perhaps unintended racism and sexism, nor worked through the social significance of their own racial, ethnic or gender location, nor grappled with feminist, anti-racist and critical scholarship on their own areas of research and teaching, may do more harm than good (Pettman 1992, p 133-134).

In other words, there is little doubt the subject of difference feminism is much altered from the subject of equality feminism, yet it is still a subject that operates within the same paradigm. Therefore, it is fundamentally governed by the same epistemological problems, some of which are summed up by Nancy Fraser:

like difference feminism, pluralist multiculturalism tends to substantialize identities, treating them as given positives instead of as constructed relations. It tends, consequently to balkanise culture, setting groups apart from one another, ignoring the way they cut across one another, and inhibiting cross-group interaction and identification. Losing sight of the fact that differences intersect, it regresses to a simple additive model of difference (Fraser 1996, p 70).

Furthermore, the epistemology of 'difference' feminism is still based on, and unites around, issues of identity. Therefore, there is an "assumption that merely being born into a set of constructed social, racial, and gender categories endows one with reliable and meaningful knowledge of what it means to be the creature whose identity is bounded by those categories" (Downs 1993, fn 6). Moreover, these marginal or minority groups must then compete with each other for legitimacy.

In addition, the Cartesian subject, albeit reformed, does not challenge the binary oppositions that structure western thought. This type of feminist subject still operates within the boundaries and therefore the limitations of the Cartesian subject – which is premised on the exclusion of the feminine, that is, a subject which is confined to the sameness/difference paradigm. Indeed this subject is torn between the need to uphold the possibility for diversity and difference while it also relies on the myth of unity and solidarity (sameness).

Descartes' construction of the subject, regardless of modifications, operates within the binary oppositions that structure western thought. A Cartesian model of subjectivity is based on a phallic economy of oneness, of sameness or an '*a priori* of the same', to borrow from Irigaray (Irigaray 1985a). For Irigaray,

To claim that the feminine can be expressed in the form of a concept is to allow oneself to be caught up again in a system of 'masculine' representations, in which women are trapped in a system of meaning which serves the auto-affection of the (masculine) subject (Irigaray 1985a, p 122-123).

Using the Cartesian subject as a model means that the feminine can only be represented by mirroring or complementing the masculine. The obvious problem with this model is that woman or the feminine "are thus reduced to or defined *only*

by terms chosen by and appropriate for masculinity” (Grosz 1989, p 105). To continue to reform constructions of the Cartesian subject, in light of these difficulties, seems a futile project. According to Peggy Kamuf “to recognize the failure of the general subject and at the same time try to overcome what is a necessary failure is a double gesture” (Kamuf 1997, p 110-111). The ‘double gesture’, or compromise, to which Kamuf draws attention, relates to, on the one hand, the acknowledged failure of the general subject to “inscribe itself beyond the specificity of its material inscription” (Kamuf 1997, p 110). Yet on the other hand, the desire to preserve the category of the unified subject entails recognition of the fact that it masks differences or particularities. This subject is then presented as a ‘*limited* generality’. This is a double gesture because “there is a certain disavowal of that [prior] recognition, as if the necessary failure could all the same be overcome” (Kamuf 1997, p 111). In other words, what is being contested is the definition of woman as the subject of feminism as a unified political subject who is also divided/fractured by her identity and affiliation with contested positions *vis á vis* her class, race, ethnicity and so on.

Gayatri Spivak, Meaghan Morris, and Gill Jagger, among other feminist philosophers, turn to deconstruction for “a way of thinking sexual difference that avoids the hierarchical relations that inhabit that opposition and the violence of exclusion inherent within them: a way of posing sexual difference in terms of multiplicity and fluidity” (Jagger 1996, p 192).

Deconstruction

What if we were to reach, what if we were to approach here (for one does not arrive at this as one would at a determined location) the area of a relationship to the other where the code of sexual marks would no longer be discriminating? (Derrida and McDonald 1997, p 39).

The above quote captures the promise of deconstruction for the ‘subject’ of feminism. This model of subjectivity is far more difficult to describe as there are no fixed components or tenets. The difficulty in describing the construction of a subject informed by deconstruction is in the nature of deconstruction itself.⁵² According to

⁵² Deconstruction and its meaning will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Derrida, to say what deconstruction is would require that deconstruction be fixed or limited in its meaning. Indeed, he states that:

All sentences of the type 'deconstruction is X' or 'deconstruction is not X', *a priori*, miss the point, which is to say that they are at least false. As you know, one of the principal things at stake in what is called in my texts 'deconstruction', is precisely the delimiting of ontology and above all the third person present indicative: S is P (Derrida 1985, p 5).

For the purpose of this chapter, a particular aspect of Derrida's work is examined; that is, the part of his work that is primarily concerned with the operations of metaphysical thought in its various forms, including ontology, onto-theology and (phal)logocentrism (Derrida 1976, p 3). Derrida gives the name 'phonocentrism'⁵³ to the (western) metaphysical obsession with presence as speech (Derrida 1982, p 293).

Moreover,

He relates this *phonocentrism* to *logocentrism* – the belief that the first and last things are the Logos, the Word, the Divine Mind, the infinite understanding of God, an infinitely creative subjectivity, and, closer to our time, the self-presence of full self-consciousness (Spivak 1976, p lxxviii).

Consequently his work attempts to deconstruct the domination of logocentrism, or the desire for the presence of Truth, Being and Meaning in western thought. In other words, as a critique of western metaphysics, deconstruction identifies the logocentric and phallogocentric assumptions of current thought; and deconstructs its binaries.⁵⁴ Derrida further develops the concept of logocentrism (primacy of the word) with

⁵³ Concepts such as logocentrism and phallogocentrism are also taken up in Chapter 3, however for the purpose of this chapter, both words are from the Greek – *phonè* literally means 'voice' and *logo* means 'word'.

⁵⁴ Grosz also uses the term phallogocentric to describe both sameness and difference arguments. She claims that:

The term [phallogocentrism] refers to the ways in which patriarchal systems of representation always submit women to models and images defined by and for men. ... There are three forms that phallogocentrism generally takes: ... women are represented as the opposites or negatives of men; ... they are represented in terms the same as or similar to men; and ... they are represented as men's complements (Grosz 1989, p xx).

phallogocentrism (masculine, or phallus, as the centre).⁵⁵ Phallogocentrism identifies the phallus in language as the 'privileged signifier'.⁵⁶

For some feminists, there are two aspects to deconstruction. It is not unusual for feminists who theorize self-representation based on the (Cartesian) subject to adopt Derridean deconstruction as a strategy for uncovering phallogocentrism in texts. Indeed, for them, the benefits of using deconstruction as a reading strategy can be abstracted from the disadvantage (for them) of using it to theorize female subjectivity and feminist praxis. In other words, these feminists claim that the main problem with deconstruction for feminism is Derrida's focus on 'woman' as an undecidable (Braidotti 1991a).

For Seyla Benhabib there is a weak and strong 'postmodern' position on what she calls 'the Death of Man, the Death of History and the Death of Metaphysics' (Benhabib 1992). On all accounts Benhabib is sympathetic to the weak position (which includes the use of deconstruction as a reading tool) while maintaining that the strong position (what she interprets as abandoning the subject altogether) is detrimental to the feminist cause.⁵⁷ Indeed, she insists that, if feminists align themselves with the death of the subject thesis, feminist theory runs the risk of "incoherence and self-contradictoriness" (Benhabib 1992, p 213).

However, Derrida is not suggesting that feminism should at this point in its history abandon 'the subject' altogether. On the contrary, given the current political system, it is necessary to be strategic about identity politics:

⁵⁵ When looking at questions of gender or constructions of subjectivity in Derrida's work, philosophy and psychoanalysis clearly overlap.

⁵⁶ Phallogocentrism is understood as:

the abstracting, universalising and generalising of masculine attributes so that women's or femininity's concrete specificity and potential for autonomous definition are covered over. It is thus more difficult to locate than sexist or patriarchal commitments, for it renders female autonomy and self-representations impossible and conceals alternatives (Caine et al. 1988, p 94).

⁵⁷ The value of "integrating the best insights of each" paradigm, as suggested by Nancy Fraser, is met with scepticism by theorists like Judith Butler (Fraser 1991, p 168; Butler 1995). To ignore the framework that informs any discussion is to fail to understand the implications or spirit of a work, which will inevitably lead to confusion. Butler also critiques Fraser's 'middle strength versions' of poststructuralist insights, see Butler (1997).

I [Derrida] have never said that the subject should be dispensed with. Only that it should be deconstructed. To deconstruct the subject does not mean to deny its existence. There are subjects, operations or effects of subjectivity. This is an incontrovertible fact. To acknowledge this does not mean, however, that the subject is what it says it is. The subject is not some meta-linguistic presence; it is always inscribed in language. My work does not, therefore destroy the subject; it simply tries to resituate it (Derrida, cited in Grosz 1995, p 234-235).

In order to interrogate Benhabib's criticism of Derrida, 'the strong thesis on the Death of the Man', this section will focus on Derrida's use of the term woman. Woman, according to Derrida, acts as a metaphor for *differánce* or as a metaphor for that which cannot be determined or defined. A key concept for Derrida – if he can be said to have one – is '*differánce*' (a neologism), spelt with an 'a', which means both to differ (spatial), and defer (temporal). Moreover, there are at least three components to *differánce*. First, it does not adhere to the privileging of speech over writing, as the difference between 'difference' and '*differánce*' can only be seen and not heard, at least not in French. Second, *differánce* inserts itself between noun and verb, as it means both to differ and defer. Third, it slips between the word and the concept as *differánce* as a word does not exist (it is not a French word), therefore it cannot be located and defined.⁵⁸ *Differánce*, a neologism, like supplement, hymen, and trace act as undecidables that cannot be contained within the binary logic of non-contradiction (Derrida 1982, p 3-27).⁵⁹

Like *differánce*, woman as a metaphor is used as a tool for subverting logocentrism and disrupting phallogocentrism. Derrida's reading of Nietzsche's use of woman as a metaphor for "that untruth of truth" in *Spurs/Eperons* crucial to understanding how Derrida came to see woman as an undecidable (Derrida 1978, p 51).⁶⁰ Derrida claims that Nietzsche espoused an affirmation of the feminine. In fact, he states that Nietzsche's (and his own) style is feminine (Derrida 1978). His understanding and explication of Nietzsche's philosophic project substantiate this claim – which read within the context of a Cartesian duality appears ridiculous. Christopher Norris

⁵⁸ This point is debatable as the term '*differánce*' has now been so clearly defined that it can be argued that it does exist.

⁵⁹ Derrida uses the word 'hymen' to undo "the assurance of mastery" (Derrida 1981b, p 260). According to Spivak:

The hymen is the always folded (therefore never single or simple) space in which the pen writes its dissemination. 'Metaphorically' it means the consummation of marriage. 'Literally' its presence signifies the absence of consummation. ... The hymen undoes oppositions because it acts as it suffers (Spivak 1976, p lxvi).

⁶⁰ An in-depth discussion and critique of 'woman as undecidable' is undertaken in Chapter 3

outlines the similarity between Nietzsche's philosophical project and his (Nietzsche's) description of woman:

there is a kind of self-implicating irony here which Derrida is quick to point out. For Nietzsche is himself engaged in precisely that 'insidious' destruction of philosophy – the undoing of its grandiose systems and concepts, the rhetorical undermining of its truth-claims – which would seem to be woman's peculiar vice. If woman is indeed the antithesis of truth, the very principle of unreason, then she can only be counted as ally (Norris 1987, p 202).

In this context, Nietzsche is referring to woman as symbolically or metaphorically constituted in discourse – Woman as a tool of analysis – not as a referent to 'real' women. According to Derrida, Nietzsche has three separate positions for Woman in regard to truth. First, Woman is the antithesis of truth, which is falsehood. Second, Nietzsche condemns Woman as a collaborator of 'truth'. Third, and most interestingly, Woman "disrupts the phallogocentric economy of truth – he affirms woman as dissimulator, as the supreme artist" (Armour 1997, p 65-66). Derrida claims that, in regard to the first two positions, Nietzsche's deployment of 'woman' is caught up in a phallogocentric sexual economy. Therefore, it is the third position that he is interested in – Woman as subversive (Derrida 1978). However, and controversially, this subversive feminine operator need not necessarily be a biological woman. She/he is considered a feminine operator (or writer) because of her/his attempt to disturb the semantic and syntactical structures that produce phallogocentric discourse, not because of any claim to being a biological man or woman.

Derrida uses terms such as 'hymen' and 'invagination' in ways that are not neutral or "simply designate figures of the feminine body" but to demonstrate that in language they are used to mean a multiplicity of things (Derrida and McDonald 1997, p 38). For example, hymen "is neither confusion nor distinction, neither identity nor difference, neither consummation nor virginity, neither the veil nor unveiling, neither the inside nor the outside" and the list goes on (Derrida 1981a, p 43). Thus, deconstruction undermines binary systems, not by replacing one unitary meaning with another but by introducing terms with multiple meanings. Both (multiple) meanings can be drawn on when reading because the (undecidable) term is irreducible to one meaning, that is, it becomes impossible to insist on one fixed, true

meaning. 'Woman', therefore, challenges the construction of a subject with a will to truth, which is unitary and hierarchical. For Peggy Kamuf,

Deconstruction remarks a certain irreducible and constitutive nonreturn of the subject to itself, an ineradicable force of difference – exteriority, materiality, otherness – within the very relation and the jealous zeal with which the same allies with itself, affects and effects itself in a movement of appropriation that is never simply given in the present but must be performed, posed, invented, or traced (Kamuf 1997, p 111).

Indeed, if one adopts a deconstructive position, one also explores the subject as a cultural/discursive construction – itself implied in a move away from the Cartesian subject. In other words, according to Derrida, woman as an undecidable disrupts and challenges the existing order of things (woman unfixes) (Derrida 1978). Thus, he claims that feminism's search for truth is condemned to failure because it refuses to move out of the existing order (based on binary logic).⁶¹ Therefore, for Derrida, the only way that woman can be part of the existing order of things is to become a man (fixed). According to Derrida:

Feminism is nothing but the operation of a woman who aspires to be like a man. And in order to resemble the masculine dogmatic philosopher this woman lays claim – just as much claim as he – to truth, science and objectivity in all their castrated delusions of virility. Feminism too seeks to castrate. It wants a castrated woman. Gone the style (Derrida 1978, p 65).

Derrida is not the only one to think along these lines.⁶² The above quote is echoed in a comment made by Luce Irigaray in 1977: "women's 'liberation' requires transforming the economic realm, and thus necessarily transforming culture and its operative agency, language" (Irigaray 1985a, p 155). Otherwise, the sameness/difference debate re-emerges with women becoming the unified masculine subject with a difference (marked as negative). Hence the need to change the existing (metaphysical) structures that women are made (by necessity) to operate in

⁶¹ According to Drucilla Cornell:

Feminism, if it is conceived as a struggle of women for political power ... cannot reach the 'underlying' problem of why sexual difference has taken the limited – and oppressive, because limited – form it has. Put simply, feminism, on this definition, replicates the dichotomous structure of gender hierarchy, even if it also seeks to put women on top. Therefore, there must be a 'beyond' feminism so *conceived* if we are to realize the dream of a new choreography of sexual difference" (Cornell 1991, p 35).

⁶² Irigaray also writes of a 'feminine style'. She states that:

This 'style' or 'writing' of women tends to put the torch to fetish words, proper terms, well-constructed forms. This 'style' does not privilege sight; instead, it takes each figure back to its source, which is among other things tactile. It comes back in touch with itself in that origin without ever constituting in it, constituting itself in it, as some sort of unity (Irigaray 1985a, p 79).

are acknowledged by both Derrida and Irigaray as imperative for rethinking the concept of the subject. According to Cornell:

If there is to be feminism at all, we must rely on a feminine 'voice' and a feminine 'reality' that can be identified as such and correlated with the lives of actual women; and yet at the same time all accounts of the feminine seem to reset the trap of rigid gender identities, deny the real differences between women (white, heterosexual women are repeatedly reminded of this danger by women of color and by lesbians) and reflect the history of oppression and discrimination rather than an ideal or an ethical positioning of the Other to which we can aspire (Cornell 1991, p 3).

Deconstruction opens the door to different and more sustainable ways of effecting political change by addressing this supposed conundrum, without falling into essentialist traps (that fix identity). For Irigaray, like Derrida, the issue is not to write (discover) a new theory about women, whereby women are posited as subjects (or objects for that matter), but to disrupt metaphysics' supposed need for this type of univocal truth. In other words, one of Irigaray's objectives is to disrupt logocentrism (Irigaray, 1985a, p 78). Both Irigaray and Derrida claim that all western frameworks are premised on logocentrism. Irigaray stresses that only by challenging logocentrism can we radically decentre established meaning. Neither Derrida nor Irigaray are suggesting that a shift in thinking will be simple. They recognize that of necessity we must work within the only systems available to us: patriarchal symbolic systems.

As discussed in the previous chapter, for Irigaray, women are trapped inside a "circle of sameness" and "woman has no unconscious except for the one man gives her" (Irigaray 1985a, p 93-94). Significantly, Irigaray suggests that this system of sameness disadvantages both men and women because men too are confined to masculine representations, which, while they profit by them, repress other ways of being. However it is women who hold the key for Irigaray. According to Susan Sellers:

[Irigaray] suggests men may work towards change by acknowledging and confronting their fear, but argues that women's close relationship to the potentially disruptive place of alterity will provide the real impetus for revolution. Since man has not achieved the perfect definition of 'Himself as Same', [Irigaray] writes, the feminine has not been completely 'ringed in' or negated by male desire. She believes a new order may be at hand in which truth will lose its univocal and universal character, to be doubled or divided between *two different* genders (Sellers 1991b, p 9-10).

The new order that Irigaray alludes to is the place of alterity (what the feminine and the masculine might be if it is no longer encased in these binaries). The

sameness/difference, feminine/masculine dichotomies are challenged and instead alterity is possible. Women need to step outside of the role left to them by a system that does not recognize 'woman'. 'Woman' only has currency in this system because of her ability to reflect man. Women can under this system do little more than mimic as the language that they have is one which they had no share in creating (Sellers 1991b, p 23). Therefore, by remaining within this current system of language women's unconscious (at the very least) will remain unknown to them (Sellers 1991b, p 10).

Sexual difference is yet to be achieved, thus "there is no way to judge in advance what forms and paths sexual difference, what the perspectives of at least two different sexes, may have to offer to concepts, thoughts, knowledges except that sexual difference makes and marks a difference everywhere" and in everything (Grosz 2005, p 166). In other words, "the affirmation of feminine difference, irreducible to being their Other, is understood as 'truly new under the sun,' a future not identifiable as the evolution of the same" yet an affirmation that is necessary if gender hierarchy is to be displaced (Cornell 1991, p 13). The next section, *Feminist Criticisms of the Poststructural 'Subject'*, will address some feminist criticisms of the poststructural 'subject' as it has been outlined by Derrida and Irigaray.

Feminist Criticisms of the Poststructural 'Subject'

In her early work, Elizabeth Grosz, who in the main supports deconstruction, argued that Derrida's use of 'woman' as a metaphor for subversion (as an undecidable), and "his understanding of the interconnections between the textual and the sexual, come perilously close to speaking *as* and *for* women" (Gross 1986, p 39-40).⁶³ In addition, Sally Robinson claims that Derrida tries to "construct a particularly seductive narrative that functions to recontain women within a metaphorical figure of *woman*" that is then used to facilitate masculine self-representation (Robinson 1991, p 79). Furthermore, Spivak, Braidotti, Robinson, and Rawlinson warn us that, while feminism has a stake in displacing gender as essence or metaphysical opposition, feminists must be careful not to transcend gender through its displacement (Spivak

⁶³ In later works, however, Grosz mounts a defence for this argument (1995, p 63-69). Elizabeth Gross and Elizabeth Grosz are one in the same. Grosz reverted back to the original spelling of her surname in 1987.

1982, p 184; Braidotti 1991a, p 103; Robinson 1991, p 84), that is, they charge Derrida with attempting “to neutralize sexual difference” thereby creating an “unmarked generic humanity” (Rawlinson 1997, p 80).⁶⁴

Nancy Hartsock voices another common response by feminists opposed to dismantling the Cartesian subject:

Why is it, exactly at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of selfhood becomes problematic (Hartsock 1989-90, p 196).⁶⁵

While Hartsock identifies the way in which women and other marginalised groups have mobilised in order to attain certain privileges, she does not address what is being lost in the process.

Susan Hekman in *Reconstituting the Subject: Feminism, Modernism, and Postmodernism* makes a distinction between the “constituting subject of the Cartesian tradition and the constituted subject” of postmodernism (Hekman 1991, p 45). For Hekman, and to use Nancy Fraser’s expression, these positions are indicative of a “false antithesis” (Fraser 1991, p 166-177). Like Fraser, Hekman suggests that feminists position themselves somewhere between these two diametrically opposite positions. Therefore, Hekman oscillates between acknowledging the benefits available from the deployment of the concept of a Cartesian subject (few by all accounts) and a theoretical defence of the ‘postmodern’ subject. However, Hekman comes to this compromise based on her understanding of the postmodern subject as lacking agency, or in a more caustic tone, as “determined and unfree – a social dupe” (Hekman 1991, p 47).

The question of agency also surfaces in Linda Alcoff’s critique of the ‘poststructural subject’. Alcoff concurs with poststructuralist notions of ‘subjectivity, until she confronts the question of agency:

⁶⁴ According to Elam, “Derrida denaturalizes the Rhetoric of the body – this leads him to concentrate on the hymen’s graphic process – without assigning essential or natural femininity to it. ... The hymen marks a space for material difference” (Elam 1994, p 61).

⁶⁵ bell hooks claims, “we should be suspicious of postmodern critiques of the ‘subject’ when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time” (hooks 1990, p 28).

My disagreement occurs, however, when they seem totally to erase any room for manoeuvre by the individual within a social discourse or set of institutions. It is that totalization of history's imprint that I reject. In their defence of a total construction of the subject, post-structuralists deny the subject's ability to reflect on the social discourse and challenge its determinations (Alcoff 1988, p 416-7).

Derrida maintains that western metaphysics is phallogocentric, that is, he insists that metaphors of woman have formed or produced the very conditions of knowledge and how we come to experience meaning. For Derrida, deconstruction of phallogocentrism inevitably leads back to 'woman'. 'Woman' is one of Derrida's undecidables (like *differánce*, trace, supplement and so on) because she cannot be fixed in the binary system on which the metaphysics of presence relies.⁶⁶ 'Woman', for Derrida, implies multiplicity, absence, elusiveness and ambiguity. When Derrida uses the word 'woman' he is referring to the multiple meanings associated with the feminine or woman, not real women as such. Clearly, he is not claiming that real women *per se*, do not exist, but that 'woman' does not have a predetermined fixed essence. Nor for that matter does the concept 'man' have a fixed essential core. In other words, a problem for anti-deconstruction feminists, in claiming that Derrida appropriates the feminine without referring to real women, is that it assumes "the independent existence of 'real' women outside of or before representation, able to rise against it, [thus this assertion] must be invested in certain unnegotiable essentialisms" (Grosz 1997, p 79). Derrida's metaphor attempts to explore the impossibility of a meaningful unified subject. Thus, he is concerned with the metaphor of woman, or how woman is constituted in discourse.⁶⁷

Clearly, these feminists recognize the importance of re-thinking subjectivity, but conceive of the poststructural 'subject' as being totally constructed and therefore, as they see it, lacking a political agency which is necessary for feminist activism. On the other hand, these feminists do not rethink the 'political' or their notions of agency to embrace the arguments of poststructuralism; therefore the poststructural subject in their hands is made to function within a modernist construction of the political. The

⁶⁶ An undecidable is something that differs from representational systems and defers indefinitely the achievement of totality, see Cornell (1992b, p 70). This point is taken up again in Chapter 3.

⁶⁷ An example is Derrida's likening of woman to distance, he claims that "a woman seduces from a distance. In fact, distance is the very element of her power" (Derrida 1978, p 49). He views this as a direct challenge to logocentrism's focus on presence. Armour provides another example, that is, woman's undecidability in "the sexual economy of phallogocentrism" (1997, p 64). Derrida's woman withdraws from an attempt to 'fix' her as either mark of the presence of the phallus, or mark of its lack. Thus, woman plays between castration and anti-castration (Armour 1997, p 66-7).

debate between Seyla Benhabib and Judith Butler highlights this point. Benhabib reads Butler's concept of performativity as creating a 'self' that is "the sum total of the gendered expressions we perform" (Benhabib 1992, p 215). Thus, she concludes that subjects are constituted by 'the gendered expressions [they] perform', and consequently have no means by which to stop the performance and "have a say in the production of the play itself" (Benhabib 1992, p 215). Butler has a very different explanation of what it means to engage in the deconstruction of the subject. For instance, she states:

To take the construction of the subject as a political problematic is not the same as doing away with the subject. To deconstruct the subject is not to negate or throw away the concept; on the contrary, deconstruction implies only that we suspend all commitments to that to which the term, 'the subject,' refers, and that we consider the linguistic functions it serves in the consolidation and concealment of authority. To deconstruct is not to negate or to dismiss, but to call into question and, perhaps most importantly, to open up a term, like 'the subject,' to a reusage or redeployment that previously has not been authorized (Butler 1991, p 159).

Susan Bordo claims that, in addition to feminist insights about the body, there are two important insights that poststructuralism contributes to feminist discussions (Bordo 1992, p 167). First, she points to Foucault's understanding of power relations. Second, she refers to the importance of language (in a Derridean sense) in the construction of subjects (Bordo 1992, p 167).⁶⁸ As opposed to structuralism, in poststructuralism the transformation of discourses is tantamount to changing the way in which the world is explained or understood. This, then, opens up opportunities to conceive of the subject in different ways. Consequentially, transforming discourses is understood by some feminists as a political project. Indeed, Butler suggests that,

If a stable notion of gender no longer proves to be the foundational premise of feminist politics, perhaps a new sort of feminist politics is now desirable to contest the very reifications of gender and identity, one that will take the variable construction of identity as both a methodological and normative prerequisite, if not a political goal (Butler 1990, p 2).

⁶⁸ Foucault's work has been very influential in feminist theory. Chapter 5 gives an indication of its impact on Australian feminism. For the purpose of this chapter, in contrast to Marxists who understand power as repressive, possessed, and operating from top to bottom, Foucault sees power as primarily productive, exercised, and is analysed as operating from bottom to top, see Sawicki (1991, p 20-21) for more details. Foucault's understanding of power is useful for understanding and organising feminist resistance.

Conclusion

As stated earlier, Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires perceive the difference between the three theoretical models of subjectivity as “a productive tension between essentialist, constructivist, and deconstructivist understandings of gendered subjectivity” (Kemp and Squires 1997, p 216). This chapter argued that a certain affinity exists between the first two models – equality and difference – albeit an essentialist equality in contrast with a constructed difference. Both models rely on the construction of a subject that is premised on ‘woman’ as a concept that has some fixed qualities. The difference between these two models is whether these common qualities are socially constructed or essentially inherent in woman’s biological make-up. For difference feminism to argue that qualities are socially constructed (masculinity/femininity) and therefore not fixed seems like a step forward. However, if the qualities that are desired are masculine qualities (associated with the subject) whether essential or constructed, then women are accepting that the feminine and all associated with it are undesirable. Therefore, the conclusions reached by both models are basically the same. Both reinforce and perpetuate the construction of a subject premised on privileging masculine qualities, or representations: man as the benchmark. Even though social constructionists have modified the Cartesian construction of the subject, this model ultimately falls back onto a problematic epistemology and exclusionary language necessary for mobilisation of women as political actors.

This chapter has shown that attempts which try to combine poststructuralist notions of subjectivity with constructions of the Cartesian subject are also problematic. The Cartesian subject is premised on an epistemology that supports and reinforces phallogocentric assumptions. Thus, it is impossible to attempt to conflate this construction with a poststructuralist construction of a subject that rejects phallogocentrism.

Derrida uses deconstruction to break/disrupt binary logic. He refers to two aspects of deconstruction: reversal of binaries and the displacement of the need to think in a binary framework. Derrida makes it clear that these two processes are not to be thought of as linear or finite. On the contrary, deconstruction is cyclical and without

telos. It is not adequate to merely reverse binaries if the structures, which support them, are still kept in place. Feminism can use deconstruction as a strategy to reverse the binary man/woman, to investigate feminine alterity, and to unsettle 'differ^{ance}' – to differ and defer. However, Derrida contends that the reversal of binaries is not enough. On the contrary, feminists should look for ways of displacing the need for a system that is based on binary logic (Derrida and McDonald 1997, p 39-40). For radical change binary logic must be transformed.

To critique the production of meanings, discourses and knowledges is fundamental to any feminist theory of subjectivity. Deconstruction advances alternative frameworks of knowledge and representation, allowing feminists to move away from or challenge concepts that oppress women, including the term 'woman' itself. Without deconstructing existing categories and the epistemological frameworks they are grounded in, feminists simply make no conceptual space available for women's self-representations. According to Irigaray:

We can assume that any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the 'masculine'. When she submits to (such a) theory, woman fails to realize that she is renouncing the specificity of her own relationship to the imaginary. Subjecting herself to objectivization in discourse – by being 'female'. Re-objectivizing her own self whenever she claims to identify herself 'as' a masculine subject. A 'subject' that would re-search itself as lost (maternal-feminine) 'object' (Irigaray 1985b, p 133).

Moreover for Butler, "to become a subject on this [sameness/difference] model is surely not a feminist goal" (Butler 1992, p 9). Thus, feminist analysis must include the deconstruction of the subject. Butler is also critical of a fixed image of woman: "if feminism presupposes that 'women' designates an undesignatable field of differences, one that cannot be totalized or summarized by a descriptive identity category, then the very term becomes a site of permanent openness and resignifiability" (Butler 1992, p 9). For Butler this means "to release the term into a future of multiple significations, to emancipate it from the maternal or racist ontologies to which it has been restricted, and to give it play as a site where unanticipated meanings might come to bear" (Butler 1992, p 9).

This chapter has provided some sense of the deconstructive project. It has outlined varied feminist responses to deconstruction and what is at stake for feminist

constructions of subjectivity if deconstruction is overlooked. The next chapter explores deconstruction in more detail.

Chapter 3: Derridean Deconstruction

If deconstruction *really* consisted in saying that everything happens in books it wouldn't deserve *five* minutes of anybody's attention.

Jacques Derrida (1985, p 15)

Introduction

To view deconstruction as merely a reading or textual strategy is to miss the point. The aim of this chapter is to explore deconstruction in relation to philosophy, by positioning it within philosophical arguments, and feminism, by highlighting feminists' interpretations, modifications and criticism of deconstruction. An explanation of deconstruction is provided with a focus on its political dimension, which responds to criticisms within some branches of feminism that deconstruction has no political application.

The first part of this chapter outlines, from close readings of Derrida's texts, what deconstruction 'could be' when applied to feminist questions.⁶⁹ More specifically, it advances a reading of deconstruction which focuses on its political dimension. The second part further develops claims concerning the usefulness of deconstruction for feminism by exploring feminist criticisms as well as feminist modifications and interpretations.

Deconstruction is now a commonly used term. Indeed, it could be argued that deconstruction has taken on a life of its own, independent of Derrida or any single theorist. As Julian Wolfreys suggests:

⁶⁹ Following Wolfreys it is more useful, and interesting, to talk about what deconstruction could be rather than what it is. See the introduction to *Deconstruction . Derrida*, for a detailed discussion (Wolfreys 1998, p 1-20).

[D]econstruction, as a practice of literary interpretation, may well have come about as a result of commentary on and interpretation of the texts of Jacques Derrida, but that Derrida himself has never practised deconstruction. Indeed I want to argue, through quoting Derrida, in commenting on Derrida and in translating Derrida, that deconstruction cannot be practised because there is not an aspect of Derrida's work which, when translated, can be turned into a theory which then can, in turn, be put into practice as a method for reading, *pace* Eagleton, Lentricchia, Rorty, and a host of lesser commentators (Wolfreys 1998, p 47).

Thus, following Wolfreys, it is not possible to come up with an explicit (working) theory or method that can be called deconstruction by reading Derrida alone.⁷⁰ In an interview with Peggy Kamuf, Derrida acknowledges that deconstruction has developed into a kind of formula. However, he adds with caution:

It's a kind of formula. I'm not disavowing the formula, but still, as soon as it becomes a technique in the instrumental sense it can't work. Nevertheless, I believe that what was indicated in this double gesture is necessary. So on the one hand there is what appears to be this technique. But there is no deconstruction without questioning of technique, without returning to the question of technique ... without recalling that deconstructions can't be reduced, can't let themselves be instrumentalized and become a method of literary criticism, for example, or a method for reading philosophical texts. At that point, it is already 'false' or 'wrong' to transform the double gesture into a device, a technical procedure. It's already insufficient (Derrida et al. 1985, p 7).

Close readings of Derrida's texts reveal key components of deconstruction, or, as Derrida puts it, "they [his texts] form as a *displacement* and as the displacement of a *question*, a certain system (Derrida 1981a, p 3, author's emphasis).⁷¹

⁷⁰ It is important to recognize the Yale School of deconstruction where Derrida gave a number of lectures (beginning in the 1970s) (Derrida 1992a, p 40). However, it is also important to note that Derridean deconstruction needs to be positioned both inside *and* outside the Yale School, with which Geoffrey Hartman, Harold Bloom, J. Hillis Miller and most importantly, Paul de Man, are associated. Distinguishing or defending 'Derridean deconstruction' against the Yale School is not particularly conducive to this discussion. Therefore, while the analysis in this thesis borrows from the Yale school's arguments it does not directly engage in discussion with any particular theorist. See the introduction to *Deconstruction Derrida*, for a detailed discussion, (Wolfreys 1998, p 1-18). Derridean deconstruction is not restricted to the Yale School's interpretation, or to any particular interpretation, inside or outside of Australia.

⁷¹ There is always this danger when constructing a 'model of deconstruction', or in any attempt to describe it, because the purpose of deconstruction is to critique traditional method, which Derrida argues is unitary and exclusionary, not to act as a substitute for it. Moreover, according to Derrida:

Deconstruction mistrusts proper names: it will not say 'Heidegger in general' says thus or so; it will deal, in the micrology of the Heideggerian text, with different moments, different applications, concurrent logics, while trusting no generality and no configuration that is solid and given (Derrida 2001a, p 9).

This can be said to apply to the name 'Derrida' as well as the name 'deconstruction'.

What Deconstruction Could Be

Derrida's seminal text *Of Grammatology* (1976) explores the main themes of deconstruction. This text is concerned with logocentrism and its impact on the western philosophical canon. In particular, *Of Grammatology* is an exposition on metaphysics, especially the impact of a 'metaphysics of presence'. Sean Burke claims, "the principle contention of *Of Grammatology* is that the repression of writing is the universally prior condition of the logocentric episteme" (Burke 1992, p 134). In order to situate these interpretations (of *Of Grammatology*) in relation to my argument, an understanding of a number of works including that of Martin Heidegger (or Derrida's reading of Heidegger), Ferdinand de Saussure (within Structural Linguistics), Claude Lévi-Strauss (within Structural Anthropology), and Jacques Lacan (within psychoanalysis) is necessary. In other words, what follows will provide a number of contexts from which deconstruction can be understood.

Metaphysics is defined as an attempt to characterise existence or reality as a whole, usually through rational argument. It involves a fundamental quest for knowledge about the existence of non-physical entities, such as God. According to Nietzsche, all metaphysical systems start with the theological question, that is, a concern with the existence and qualities of God. However, and perhaps more controversially, the study of metaphysics also questions the scientific assumption that physical objects actually exist (Audi 1995, p 489). The primary component of metaphysics is ontology (the study of existence itself). Empiricists such as David Hume⁷² claim that metaphysics is merely Sophism and have long contested its connection to philosophy.⁷³ Interestingly, what is commonly referred to as Continental philosophy is largely preoccupied with the study of metaphysics. Deconstruction is most often situated within this philosophical framework. As Derrida says, "deconstruction is also a symptom. It's a symptom that takes a philosophical form most often. Philosophical and literary" (Derrida et al. 1985, p 18). Indeed, Derrida looks to both

⁷² Hume states: Philosophy "cannot go beyond experience; and any hypothesis that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical" (Hume, cited in Audi 1995, p 342).

⁷³ Sophists were ancient Greeks who traded in knowledge (mainly around ethical issues) for a fee. Philosophers regarded them as "intellectual charlatans". For more information see De Crescenzo (1989).

philosophy and literature to demonstrate the pervasiveness of a metaphysics of presence.⁷⁴

Derrida claims that philosophy, as a discipline, has a vested interest in seeing itself unaffected by language, independent of its own history, textuality and materiality. In addition, philosophy regards itself as working with ‘pure’ concepts, unhampered by the linguistic tools upon which it must rely (Gross 1986a, p 72). Somewhat ironically, Derrida uses the language of philosophy (Being, Truth, Reason) against itself, in order to uncover philosophy’s dependence on “the transcendental signified” or “the pure presence of meaning” (Gross 1986a, p 72).⁷⁵

Feminist critics, such as Seyla Benhabib, claim that there is no evidence for Derrida’s ‘metaphysics of presence’ (Benhabib 1992, p 223–225).⁷⁶ On the contrary, Derrida has repeatedly shown how a metaphysics of presence operates in western thought systems. This next section will highlight particular instances of a metaphysics of presence identified by Derrida. First, it is useful to begin with Derrida’s reading of the Saussurean sign. For Derrida, the Saussurean sign is exemplary of the practice of a ‘metaphysics of presence’. He claims that Saussure, in his attempt to create a science of language, deliberately devalued the place of the written word.

For Saussure, language is a “system of signs that express ideas” (Saussure, cited in Silverman 1983, p 4). The sign is composed of two elements, the signifier and the signified. The signifier pertains to the sound–image associated with any given concept, while the signified refers to the concept’s form or the meaning given to that sound–image. These two facets of the sign are realized, or actualized, in the spoken

⁷⁴ Derrida links deconstruction with philosophy and literature. He states that “deconstruction ... is a coming-to-terms with literature” (Derrida et al. 1985, p 9).

⁷⁵ Interestingly, according to Norris, it is for this reason that some literary critics claim that, “deconstruction [is] literature’s revenge on philosophy” (Norris 1987, p 23).

⁷⁶ In fact, Benhabib states:

In considering this point [death of metaphysics] it would be important to note right at the outset that much of the postmodernist critique of western metaphysics itself proceeds under the spell of a meta-narrative, namely, the narrative first articulated by Heidegger and then developed by Derrida that ‘Western metaphysics has been under the spell of the ‘metaphysics of presence’ at least since Plato ...’ This characterization of the philosophical tradition allows postmodernists the rhetorical advantage of presenting what they are arguing against in its least defensible versions (Benhabib 1992, p 223).

word. Writing is merely the transcription or representation of the spoken word, or speech. Moreover, meaning for Saussure is produced in the relationship between items (differences) not the items themselves. The phonic element, or the word attached to that item is arbitrary. Derrida shows that Saussure's argument relies on a contradictory logic. That is, despite Saussure insisting on the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified, his theory relies on the understanding that the signifier (psychic sound) has a natural relationship to the signified. In other words, Saussure claimed that there is a natural order, or connection, between sound and sense; an order that excludes, or leaves no space for, the written word. The sign, which Saussure maintains is arbitrary, cannot *also* be perceived as a natural hierarchy between speech and writing. Indeed, this same logic also questions the natural order between meaning and its phonic representation. In other words, Derrida identifies two contradictions in Saussure's logic: the privileging of speech over writing, and the supposed natural order between the phonic sound and meaning. According to Derrida, a metaphysics of presence operates (or is necessary) to uphold the signified as presence and the signifier as the absence of the signified presence.⁷⁷

For Derrida, there are philosophical implications from Saussure's metaphysics of presence:

It is not a simple analogy: writing, the letter, the sensible inscription, has always been considered by Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, to speech, and to the *logos*. And the problem of soul and body is no doubt derived from the problem of writing from which it seems – conversely – to borrow its metaphors (Derrida 1976, p 35).

In other words, the written word is analogous with materiality. Philosophy and metaphysics have a stake in denying, or devaluing, this materiality. For instance, this principle derives from Plato's strict division between mind (pure thought) and matter (body). Derrida reminds us that, in western philosophy, pure thought is violated by bodily or material functions, such as passion or instinct. *Logos* as *phoné*, or pure thought, privileges the presence of a rational, transcendent voice.⁷⁸ Derrida names the metaphysical preoccupation with self-presence of meaning as 'logocentrism' (Derrida 1981b, p 4). Following Derrida, a metaphysics of presence is the effect of logocentrism. In other words, metaphysics installed presence at its origin by

⁷⁷ For Derrida's critique of the Saussurean sign see *Of Grammatology* (1976), especially Chapter 2.

⁷⁸ *Logos* is derived from the Greek and stands for pure reason, speech, logic, the Word and so on.

suppressing the signifier over the signified. That is, presence in-itself was privileged over presence itself: hence, the logocentricity of the Saussurean model.

Another instance of a metaphysics of presence is evident in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss. In order to make anthropology more scientific, Lévi-Strauss explored kinship structures looking for patterns that underlie behaviour. Derrida states that Lévi-Strauss creates a (historical) time when writing did not exist: a Rousseauian utopia (The Noble Savage). Then, in a sudden gesture, he simply places writing there, violating this pure space. Lévi-Strauss (after Rousseau) maintains that writing is how one passes from the authentic and innocent to the corrupted (primitive/socialised), a claim Derrida vehemently dismisses. Rather, he states that there is no pure origin, because writing, difference, and violence have been and are always already there (Derrida 1976, p 101-107).⁷⁹ Derrida argues that the place of writing within western metaphysics was made to be inferior or ‘unnatural’; a poor substitute for pure speech or unmediated thought, once again reinforcing a metaphysics of presence.

In addition, an important instance of the metaphysics of presence, for Derrida, can be seen in the work of Martin Heidegger. For Heidegger, philosophy lost its way when it forgot the question of Being (a perception/sense of ourselves as contingently existent, spatio-temporally located beings) (Holland 1997, p 11). According to Heidegger, ontological difference is the difference between the binary terms Being (*Sein*) and beings (*Dasein*) (Derrida 1982, p 31-32). Being, according to Heidegger, is something that beings have a relationship with. Moreover, the difference between the two terms is both spatial (beings can be located, being is never anywhere) and temporal (beings exist in a particular season, being is timeless). Thus, Heidegger distinguishes between the ever ‘presentness’ of Being and the finitude of beings.⁸⁰ For Heidegger, in order to say, or accept, that ‘I am’ requires that we first accept the possibility that anything can be. Therefore, the question of Being is *always already* posed regardless of the field of inquiry. In other words, “that something is

⁷⁹ Derrida’s understanding of ‘originary violence’ will be taken up again later in this chapter.

⁸⁰ For a more detailed account of the difference between Being and beings, as understood by Heidegger, see Norris (1991, especially p 68-70). Briefly “the crucial distinction between ‘Being’ and ‘beings’, [is] the former conceived as the ground of existence prior to all knowledge, the latter as the realm of existent entities already marked out by reason” (Norris 1991, p 69).

presupposes that *anything* can be” (Spivak 1976, p xiv). Heidegger insisted that to think the difference between Being (presence) and beings (present) would be the end of metaphysics.

Derrida claims that his work could not have been possible “without the opening of Heidegger’s question”, that is, the distinction between Being and beings (Derrida 1981a, p 9). He agrees with Heidegger on the need for “undoing the conceptual knots and ties implicit in Western philosophy” (Norris 1991, p 69). However, it is when Heidegger attempts to set up Being as the transcendental signified that Derrida takes his departure. In the introduction to *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Spivak writes:

To be sure, when Heidegger sets Being before all concepts, he is attempting to free language from the fallacy of a fixed origin, which is also a fixed end. But, *in a certain way*, he also sets up Being as what Derrida calls the ‘transcendental signified’. For whatever a concept might “mean,” anything that is conceived of in its being–present must lead us to the already–answered question of Being. In that sense, the sense of the final reference Being is indeed the final signified to which all signifiers refer. But Heidegger makes it clear that Being cannot be contained by, is always prior to, indeed transcends, signification. It is therefore a situation where the signified commands, and is yet free of, all signifiers – a recognizably theological situation (Spivak 1976, p xvi, author’s emphasis).

In his search for origins, Heidegger sought to install presence at the origin by repressing the signifier over the signified. In other words, he gave primacy to presence in–it–self over presence itself, thereby once again reinscribing the very thing that he attempted to move away from.

Amongst the similarities between Derrida and Heidegger is the way in which both critique the Cartesian subject. For instance, like Derrida:

Heidegger rejects what he identifies as the man–centeredness of the modern world in a number of ways. First, he rejects the transcendental, privileged status of the Cartesian subject. Man, he claims, is always historical, rooted and a product of a particular manifestation of Being. Second, Heidegger rejects the definition of truth as the agreement of known object and knowing subject; Third, he attacks the Cartesian subject because it gives metaphysical priority to man the subject. It thus provides man with a privileged standpoint, an Archimedean point, that violates the historicity of Being. This aspect of Heidegger’s critique of the subject represents an important element of the contemporary attack on the subject (Hekman 1990, p 65).

A metaphysics of presence seeks to understand the subject (the person) as a self–identical unity. For instance, Descartes was preoccupied with “the unity of consciousness and its immediate presence to itself”, hence his famous statement, ‘I think, therefore I am’ (Young 1986, p 3). The tradition of transcendental philosophy

from Descartes through Kant to Husserl perceives the subject as a unity and an origin: “the self–same starting point of thought and meaning whose signification is never out of its grasp” (Young 1986, p 3).⁸¹ Indeed, in Lacanian terms, in order for the subject to enter the symbolic order, it must be unified. However, for Derrida, the Lacanian split subject remains split. The Law of the Father, which relies on a phallic authority or a theological self–presence (Being), can only give the illusion of unity.

In a like manner, Derrida claims that binaries rely on the assumption that presence is privileged over absence. Therefore, the self is privileged over the other – and perhaps more significantly Being is privileged over being. Speech, for Derrida, is synonymous with Being (self–present) and writing is synonymous with being (absence).

Lacan, too, has shown that within language itself there are “systematically instituted inequalities of gender difference” (Nye 1988, p 174). Language is not neutral. On the contrary, language is encoded in such a way that it produces sexual difference. For Lacan, language is the only way that the split subject can become unified (ego). It is through language that the subject enters the symbolic order. The phallus, as the transcendental signified, organises the western symbolic order, that is, the phallus acts as the central cultural signifier (phallogentrism). Derrida interprets Lacan’s notion of a (privileged) phallic identity as reinscribing the metaphysics of presence. In other words, Lacanian psychoanalysis upholds and maintains the existing symbolic order, which relies on the privileging of the phallus (God or Logos).⁸²

What Lacan does not overtly refer to, but is taken up by deconstructionists in relation to his work, is the sexualization of discursive positions. According to Barbara Johnson:

⁸¹ See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of constructions of ‘the subject’ in relation to philosophy.

⁸² According to Henry Staten, “the narcissistic attempt to develop the unified self-identity of the pure pleasure-ego is the attempt to repress differ^{ance} within the self and so to overcome death as the relation to a mortal other” (Staten 1984, p 154).

Language, since it is *constitutive* of the human, cannot itself be entirely 'human'. It is neither inside nor outside of the subject, but both at once. As the ground of possibility of expressive intentionality, language cannot itself be entirely reduced to that interpretability. This does not mean language *never* means anything, but rather that beyond the apparent meaning, and even beyond the suppressed or hidden meanings (unconscious, poetic, ideological, counter discursive) there can always be a residue of functioning – which produces effects – that is not a *sign* of anything, but merely that outcome of linguistic rules, or even of 'the absolute randomness of language' (De Man 1979, p 299). Not that language is always absolutely random, but that we can never be sure that it isn't (Johnson 1987, p 6, author's emphasis).

Language produces certain effects; some are easily recognizable while others require deconstructing. Consequently, access to language as a tool for expression is limited by the very nature of language. Kelly Oliver claims that Derrida positions 'the subject' as "the star witness" of the metaphysics of presence (Oliver 1998, p 112). This subject is then shown to be implicated in, and a product of, the very thing it claims to control, language.

Derrida states that speech (as presence or perfect self-present meaning) could only be brought about by the suppression of writing: a secondary substitute for the absence of speech (Johnson 1981, p ix). For Derrida, this is particularly significant because one term (in the couple speech/writing) can only be thought of because of the other.⁸³ Meaning is *not* the result of a basic essence of language but the consequence of it (Wood 1979, p 18). Indeed, once the idea of a self-present God (Logos) is rejected then speech is just another form of writing, or more specifically, *graphie* in its broadest sense. For instance, Derrida states:

Now we must think that writing is at the same time more exterior to speech, not being its 'image' or its 'symbol', and more interior to speech, which is already in itself a writing. Even before it is linked to incision, engraving, drawing, or to the letter, to a signifier referring in general to a signifier signified by it, the concept of *graphie* [unit of a possible graphic system] implies the framework of the *instituted trace*, as the possibility common to all systems of signification (Derrida 1976, p 46).

Thus, Derrida claims that writing has been falsely constructed as a supplement to speech. The consequence of this tradition (for philosophy) is that:

Philosophical discourse defines itself in opposition to writing and thus in opposition to itself, but this self-division or self opposition is not, Derrida claims, a mistake or accident that sometimes occurs in philosophical texts. It is a structural property of the discourse itself (Culler 1982, p 89).

⁸³ Further, speech is limited by the same conditions that make writing possible.

In other words, philosophy sets up a centre/origin against the subordinated other (for example, the phallus is a privileged term) and philosophy (in the Saussurean sense) sets up an endless slippage of meaning by setting up speech as a privileged term that is not governed by the same rules that apply to writing.

Derrida contends that to undermine the privilege of speech is to undermine the foundations of western philosophy. For instance, he maintains that, “the sign is that ill-named thing ... which escapes the instituting question of philosophy” (Derrida 1976, p 19). That is, Derrida argues that meaning is not immediately present in a sign. Rather, meaning is “dispersed along the whole chain of signifiers” thereby making it difficult to locate (Sarup 1989, p 35–36). Elizabeth Gross further elucidates the Derridean concept of the sign:

[T]he sign is *not* the presence of an absence (the presence, in words or writing, of the concept in the absence of the thing), for it is always a *trace*, a mark, a material inscription. It is always a form of *writing*. The trace is indistinguishably presence and absence, original and imitation (Gross 1986a, p 73–74, author’s emphasis).

In order to make visible what has been precluded, Derrida privileges writing over speech, by claiming that it is the precondition of language and therefore speech (Norris 1991, p 28). Plainly, Derrida is not referring to a common sense understanding of the word ‘writing’. Norris elaborates:

Writing for Derrida, is the ‘free play’ or element of undecidability within every system of communication. Its operations are precisely those which escape the self-consciousness of speech and its deluded sense of the mastery of concept over language. Writing is the endless displacement of meaning which both governs language and places it for ever beyond the reach of a stable, self-authenticating knowledge. In this sense, oral language already belongs to a ‘generalized writing’, the effects of which are everywhere disguised by the illusory ‘metaphysics of presence’. Language is always inscribed in a network of relays and differential ‘traces’ which can never be grasped by the individual speaker (Norris 1991, p 28–9).

Derrida coined the term *arche-writing* to describe the time before (*always already*) a distinction was made between speech and writing.⁸⁴ Thus, for Derrida there is “writing in speech” or writing before the letter (or graphic notation) (Spivak 1976, p lxx). Clearly, it would be a misreading to claim that Derrida privileges the written word over the spoken word, as this merely reverses the binary, leaving the internal structure firmly in place. Rather, he moves beyond reversing the binary speech/writing to a deconstruction that does not legitimate such an opposition. In

⁸⁴ Arche is from the Greek and it means beginning or origin.

other words, *arche-writing* serves to deconstruct the binary speech/writing. For this reason Derrida claims to

Prefer to speak of 'mark' rather than of language. In the first place the mark is not anthropological; it is prelinguistic; it is the possibility of language, and it is everywhere there is relation to another thing or relation to an other (Derrida 2001a, p 76).

Derrida borrows from Heidegger's hermeneutic method of inquiry to call attention to the limitations of language. For instance, Derrida uses the Heideggerian strategy of *sous rature* or 'under erasure'. Spivak explains:

This [under erasure] is to write a word, cross it out, and then present both word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible.) To take an example from Derrida 'the sign is that ill-named thing [the only one] which escapes the instituting question of philosophy' (Spivak 1976, p xiv).

This practice is more than a textual strategy. Indeed, what Heidegger was pointing to is the limitation and yet necessity of language. Derrida, too, stresses the need to recognize that there is no place outside of language to position oneself. Thus, Derrida insists that,

We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is alien to this history [*of metaphysics*]; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulation of precisely what it seeks to contest (Derrida 1992b, p 152).

The strategy of 'under erasure' points to this paradox. We must use language in order to communicate and yet the strategy of 'under erasure' forces us to recognize language's limitations. Heidegger puts the word Being under erasure. In response to the history of metaphysics, Derrida places, among others, trace, *differánce*, hymen, and dissemination 'under erasure'. By placing these words 'under erasure' he frees language of its need for a fixed origin or an end, as the meanings associated with these words are multiple and shifting.

These examples are a few of the many that Derrida draws on to highlight western thought's reliance on a metaphysics of presence. Moreover, against this background it is possible to state more clearly Derrida's own enterprise. For Derrida, deconstruction is a way in which to question the presumed inherent value placed on one characteristic of a binary as opposed to the other – which is a direct result of a metaphysics of presence. This is evident in his focus on the way in which writing

has been precluded from language. Derrida attempts to break down (deconstruct) binaries used in philosophy by highlighting the discursive power that keeps them in place. In effect, he claims that binaries operate in two ways: they suppress one term, and then deliberately privilege the other.

Derrida is not suggesting that ‘the metaphysics of presence’ is an accident of history or an unfortunate oversight; rather that it has been (and is) a necessary and deliberate precondition for philosophy. He argues that phonocentrism (privileging of speech or *phoné*) is one of the basic assumptions of western philosophy. Philosophy is grounded on the assumption that it produces ideas, not texts made up of words that are implicated by their connection to material reality (social and discursive practices) (Gross 1986b, p 30). For example, Socrates did not think it worthwhile to pen any of his work. Instead, his student Plato recorded his philosophy in the form of dialogues after his death.⁸⁵ Moreover according to Staten:

[P]hilosophers have generally maintained a confident optimism in the possibility of purifying language, of finding its core of truth-telling power. The aim has been subordination of language to the reality which that language is to describe; yet that reality is itself postulable only in language. Deconstruction could be seen as founded in a skeptical questioning of the power of philosophical language to give us a reality that is more than reality-as-presented-by-philosophical-language. And yet this skepticism might go with a feeling of perfect at-homeness in the world and of quite unbothered satisfaction, for ordinary purposes, with our ordinary ways of talking about the world — that is, with talk about “objects” and “reality” that does not seek to generalize and formalize itself, to give itself a transcendental reassurance of its connection with reality (Staten 1984, p 20).

Following Derrida, the way to challenge a metaphysics of presence is to displace/disrupt or deconstruct binaries; he calls this deconstruction.⁸⁶ The goal for deconstruction is, first, to locate the determining infrastructure, and, second, to reverse the hierarchical binary that keeps this infrastructure in place (to show how the ‘privileged’ term relies on the ‘other’), and finally, to displace the binary by introducing a ‘new’ or hinge term.

⁸⁵ “Socrates, he who does not write” (Nietzsche, cited in Derrida 1976). The written word is viewed as the mark of absence or death. Thus, it is worth noting that Plato used the form of dialogues rather than prose to record Socrates’ philosophy – as a more ‘authentic’ way of recording the spoken word.

⁸⁶ Derrida states, “Grammatology must deconstruct everything that ties the concept and norms of scientificity to ontology, logocentrism, phonologism” (Derrida 1981a, p 35).

For instance, Derrida's employment of 'trace' disrupts the privileging of the difference between pure thought and the sign, as trace is neither presence nor absence, but indistinguishably both.⁸⁷ For Derrida "a text ... is the play of presence and absence, a place of the effaced trace" (Spivak 1976, p lvii). He maintains that:

Such is the strange 'being' of the sign: half of it always "not there" and the other half always "not that". The structure of the sign is determined by the trace or track of the other which is forever absent (Derrida, cited in Spivak 1976, p xvii).

According to Derrida, there is a paradox in language. On the one hand, due to recent understandings of the impact of logocentrism, the sign can no longer be seen as an inferior or secondary representation of something pure (it can stand alone); on the other hand, once it assumes this position it is placed into crisis. By its very definition, the sign is a mechanism for relaying "an instance prior to it, the moment this instance withdraws, the very identity of language does as well" (Beardsworth 1996, p 7). Derrida states:

One is necessarily led to this from the moment that the trace affects the totality of the sign in both its faces. That the signified is originally and essentially (and not only for a finite and created spirit) trace, that is *always already in the position of the signifier*, is the apparently innocent proposition within which the metaphysics of logos, of presence and consciousness, must reflect upon writing as its death and its resource (Derrida 1976, p 73, author's emphasis).

'Trace' also suggests that language is undecidable, that is, language has to be recognized as vocabulary or words. Derrida locates words (like trace) that slide between presence and absence, hence problematising philosophy's need to establish full presence, which, as stated before, is central to western metaphysics.

By focusing on *differánce* (spelt with an 'a') it is possible to see what Derrida means by an 'undecidable'. *Differánce* means both to differ (a spatial relationship among words involved in signification), and defer (temporal – the effect of that relation's undecidability). This neologism (one of many) is used to conceive of the difference between hierarchical binaries, such as identity/difference or speech/writing (Gross 1986b, p 32). That is, it is "a play of difference within difference that precedes any distinction" (Gross 1986a, p 73).

⁸⁷ Clearly Derrida is not trying to reproduce the Hegelian dialectic, whereby a middle term is produced that is the sum of both terms, for example man/women equals androgyny (Gross 1986b, p 28). On the contrary, Derrida claims that the invention of a new term in the Hegelian sense merely makes it possible to forget the reason that the first term was inadequate in the first place.

By way of reiteration, below is an example of how *differánce* is neither spatial nor temporal (and both). Grosz' example of the sign clearly demonstrates that:

The sign gains its 'spatial identity' from its negative, differential relation to other signs and sign-components. It gains its 'temporal identity' only by means of displacement, deferral or delay. Meaning is not the full presence of the sign, but is the product of an endless deferral or putting off. Meaning is not absent but postponed, supplemented. The sign is not the presence of the signified but its continuous delay (Grosz 1986a, p 74, author's emphasis).

Meaning is produced in the play (contrasts and differences) between signs. Thus, meaning is nowhere immediately present, it is always part of a semantic slippage, which means that it (forever) remains unable to be fixed, or fully grasped. *Differánce* acts as "one set of marks in a signifying chain which exceeds and disturbs the classical economy of language and representation" (Norris 1987, p 15).

Derrida has located other such 'hinge words' or undecidables, some of which have already been mentioned, which, like *differánce*, he uses to disrupt hierarchical binaries. These include trace (simultaneously presence and absence), supplement (both excess and lack), *pharmakon* (both poison and cure), dissemination (both fertilisation and fruitlessness), hymen (both inside and outside), and *arche*-writing (both speech and writing). Derrida uses these concepts to overturn binary thinking – he is not, as in the Hegelian dialectic, creating a third term (*Aufhebung*).⁸⁸ Rather, he is showing that "the linear unitary phallocratic will to truth cannot be sustained" (Hekman 1990, p 165–166).⁸⁹ Having said that, for Derrida, "the deconstruction of philosophy does not renounce truth" (Derrida 2001a, p 10). Rather, "it is a question of thinking this other relation to truth" (Derrida 2001a, p 10).⁹⁰ Further, Derrida claims that the process of deconstruction is never ending because working from the inside means that it is always possible to get caught up in the system that one is trying to deconstruct. To put it in his own words:

⁸⁸ According to Derrida, he has "never *opposed* the dialectic. Be it opposition to the dialectic or war against the dialectic, it's a losing battle. What it really comes down to is thinking a dialecticity of dialectics that is itself fundamentally not dialectical" (Derrida 2001a, p 33).

⁸⁹ In *Positions* (1981a, p 40–41) Derrida suggests that the Hegelian notion of sublation or *Aufhebung* was instrumental in formulating his notion of *differánce* (or the 'undecidable').

⁹⁰ In other words, it is not as simple as saying that for deconstruction, philosophy is simply literature with no claim to truth; or, indeed, that there is no truth in literature. On the contrary, deconstruction claims that the notion of truth needs to be deconstructed, or at the very least 'questioned'.

The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work (Derrida 1976, p 24, author's emphasis).

To sum up: Derrida has two criticisms of western philosophy's reliance on a metaphysics of presence. First, he claims that the attempt to bring things into unity is condemned to failure, since a term can only be identified by its relationship to another within this framework. For example, 'inside' only has meaning because of our understanding of 'outside'. Further, if a thing is inside it cannot be outside at the same time. Therefore, Derrida claims that unity is never possible. He responds to this paradox with the logic/science of the supplement: "The supplement 'is' an 'addition' [that] comes to *make up* for a deficiency, ... to compensate for a primordial non self-presence" (Derrida, cited in Spivak 1976, p lxxi). Further, this concept eludes binary classification as it means both lack and excess. For Derrida, this insight exposes the way in which one term is necessarily implicated and reliant on the other (term) (Young 1986, p 4). In other words, a single word does not have any meaning on its own; it can only be defined through association with other words. Derrida states:

The supplement, which is neither simply the signifier nor the representer, does not take the place of a signified or a represented, as is prescribed by the concepts of signification or representation or by the syntax of the words 'signifier' or 'representer'. The supplement comes in the place of a lapse, a non signified or a non represented, a non presence. There is no present before it, it is not preceding by anything but itself, that is to say by another supplement. The supplement is always the supplement of a supplement. One wishes to go back *from the supplement to the source*: one must recognize that there is *a supplement of the source* (Derrida 1976, p 303–304, author's emphasis).

The violence and exclusion that is necessary to uphold the binaries of logocentrism (in this case sameness/difference) are revealed through a logic of supplementarity. As stated in Chapter Two, binary logic is the very structure that produces the desire for an autonomous subject. This concept is important to the workings of deconstruction. In her introduction to *Dissemination*, Johnson uses the phrase 'a supplementary logic' to describe the project of deconstruction (Johnson 1981, p x–xiii). For Hekman, a supplementary logic is "a logic that breaks the binary oppositions of logocentrism" (Hekman 1990, p 171). In a 'common sense', or 'conventional' sense, the supplement means to add what is missing (to fill a gap) or it

acts as a surplus (an extra). The supplement, however, is neither part of, nor outside of the thing itself. For instance, a postscript to a letter is part of the letter, but also acts as an added extra. It forms part of the letter without being part of the letter, or it belongs without belonging. Therefore, complicating or ‘decentering’ ‘original’ meanings will necessarily produce a radical transformation of the text.

The logic of supplementarity not only challenges binaries but it challenges the logic which binaries are based on. Thus, the logic of supplementarity moves beyond logocentric closure. Derridean deconstruction challenges binary systems, not by replacing one unitary meaning for another, but by transforming terms to make visible their multiple meanings. In addition, a supplementary logic makes it difficult to look for origins or original meanings.

An individual cannot escape the law of the supplement. For example, this text the thesis, while purporting to be ‘original’, is a supplement. Moreover, primary texts are no more ‘original’ than critical reviews, commentaries or other so called secondary texts. That is, the notion of the supplement breaks the myth that the secondary text cannot be read without reference to the ‘original’. Indeed, even so-called ground-breaking texts, like *Of Grammatology*, are supplements. Deconstruction, as a strategy of supplementarity, offers a radical conceptual breakthrough in meaning, which transforms understanding.

In addition, Derrida uses the term *differánce* to define a style of writing. This type of writing sees “writing as a difference which precedes ontological difference as the unthought of metaphysics” (Burke 1992, p 119). Burke claims that if Derrida were ‘right’ this style of writing would represent a break with metaphysics, as we know it (Burke 1992, p 119). Grosz, too, is aware of the radical nature of this type of thinking. She claims that Derrida is “among the first [to provide] a serious and sustained *alternative* to the dominant search for a clear, neutral, transparent language to express the truths of philosophical discovery” (Gross 1986a, p 74, my emphasis). Gross states that:

Derrida wants to use philosophy's central concepts Truth, Being and Meaning, against itself – use its own language. Especially philosophy's commitment to "the transcendental signified" – the pure presence of meaning. The pure concept unmediated by language, unrelated to power and the contingencies of daily and social life. His aim is not to eliminate metaphysics but to take it to its limits – to acknowledge unspoken oppositions, exclusions, and privileging of certain hierarchical structures (Gross 1986a, p 72).

Feminist theorists, including Elizabeth Grosz, Drucilla Cornell, Kelly Oliver and Peggy Kamuf, have taken up aspects of Derridean deconstruction. What follows is the particular ways in which these feminists read deconstruction, especially in relation to its political efficacy. But first, it is important to address feminist criticisms of deconstruction.

Feminist Criticism of Deconstruction

While there is an array of criticisms levelled against deconstruction, this section will address two important and oft mentioned criticisms. The first is a brief review of Derrida's use of the term 'woman', brief because this issue was discussed in the previous chapter. Secondly, and in more detail, the next section takes issue with the claim made in some feminist circles that deconstruction fails to offer any practical political direction.

'Woman' as Undecidable

Any feminist standpoint will necessarily be partial. Thinking about women may illuminate some aspects of a society that have been previously suppressed within the dominant view. But none of us can speak for 'woman' because no such person exists except within a specific set of (already gendered) relations – to 'man' and to many concrete and different women (Flax 1987, p 642).

Derrida's use of the term 'woman' as an undecidable has generated much discussion among feminists. A common apprehension for some feminists is a concern that women's particular 'experience' is neglected by deconstruction. For instance, Teresa de Lauretis suggests that deconstruction erases the embodied subject (de Lauretis 1984). Mary Rawlinson also states that deconstruction attempts to "neutralize sexual difference", thereby creating an "unmarked generic humanity" (Rawlinson 1997, p 80). Rosalyn Diprose notes that Derrida's use of the feminine has no material

referent, 'women' in his texts operate only through metaphor (Diprose 1991, p 14-16). The following section will address these criticisms in relation to Derrida's use of the term 'woman' and what it might contribute to feminist theory.

By developing the idea that there is no origin, or fixed centre, Derrida highlights the importance of language as discourse. That is, language does not simply reflect or project meaning. On the contrary, meaning is an effect of language: hence the importance of the written word (or more precisely, the text) for deconstruction. For Derrida, no one element of discourse can have meaning in and of itself. Meaning is only possible through the inter-significative relationship between elements. These relationships are intricate and intertwined by traces of other elements in a chain of signification. Meaning cannot be independent or self-evident as it relies on 'traces of traces'. As Flax suggests in the above quote, the term 'woman' has no meaning independent of other complex terms, including the term 'man'.

As a theoretical exercise, feminism can use deconstruction as a strategy to reverse the binary man/woman in order to highlight the exclusion, dependence, and violence necessary to keep that binary in place. Nevertheless, for radical change to occur, binary logic must be transformed. In other words, the process of displacement may begin with a reversal of the binary man/woman; however, this cannot be the final stage. In an interview with Christie McDonald, Derrida claims "when sexual difference is determined by *opposition* in the dialectical sense ... one appears to set off 'the war between the sexes'; but one precipitates the end with victory going to the masculine sex" (Derrida and McDonald 1997, p 33). The metaphysics of presence has predetermined the victor. Thus, the goal for feminism should be to displace phallogocentrism and not to replace one dominant discourse with another. Obviously, Derrida is not stating anything about feminism that feminists have not already recognized or made comment on. In an early paper titled "Women's Time" (1986), Julia Kristeva took up and developed this very point.⁹¹ Kristeva identifies

⁹¹ 'Woman's Time' was published in French in 1979, but it first appeared in English in *Signs*, Vol. 7 No, 1 (1981) page 13-35. However, all references to this essay in this thesis will be from *The Kristeva Reader* (1986).

three phases of feminism.⁹² In the first phase, woman vies for equality with man on man's terms. Kristeva relegates this phase to the realm of metaphysics (Kristeva 1986). In the second phase of feminism, which, according to Kristeva, is linked to the May 1968 uprising (discussed elsewhere in this thesis), feminists are:

Essentially interested in the specificity of female psychology and its symbolic realizations, these women seek to give a language to the intrasubjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture in the past (Kristeva 1986, p 194).

This phase of feminism aims to reverse the binary man/woman by identifying and privileging the feminine, which was previously devalued. Kristeva finds this position problematic, inasmuch as "such a feminism rejoins, on the one hand, the archaic (mythical) memory and, on the other, the cyclical or monumental temporality of marginal movements" (Kristeva 1986, p 194-195). In other words, Kristeva suggests that both these phases of feminism reinforce and reiterate the division implicit in the dichotomy man/woman. Whether women support a feminism that fights for equality with men (on men's terms) or whether women fight for a woman-centred language or culture (that competes with men's), both are falling into the problematics of binary thinking, linked to metaphysics. Rather, Kristeva suggests that a third phase of feminism be adopted where there is a refusal to frame issues in terms of dichotomies, such as identity/difference or masculine/feminine. This phase is extremely political. The political dimension will become more apparent in the following discussion.

Derrida recognizes that the struggle to overcome binary representation is not new to feminism. Like Kristeva, he also identifies two ways in which feminists have tried to challenge the binary oppositions which have structured western thought. First, he states that feminists have attempted to take on masculine characteristics, recognizing that there is no reason why they should be inherently male. Second, he states that feminists have attempted to reverse the binaries by privileging the feminine. For Derrida, both these types of feminisms work in opposition to deconstruction. Nevertheless, he states:

⁹² These three phases bear some similarity to those discussed in Chapter 2: Identity feminism; difference feminism; and deconstruction.

I believe feminism is necessary. Feminism has been necessary and is still necessary in certain situations. But at a given moment, to close oneself in feminism is to reproduce the very thing one is struggling against. And here too there are gestures that are necessary, staggered, that have to be practiced at the same time or successively (Derrida et al. 1985, p 30).

Derrida, like Kristeva, cautions feminists to rethink premises so that feminism does not go on endlessly repeating the past. While Derrida's point is useful for some feminists, it fails to acknowledge, as Kristeva does, the 'post 1968' French influenced feminism. Some feminists are doing more than changing the surface structure in the way that Derrida suggests. On the contrary, feminists such as Barbara Johnson, Elizabeth Grosz and Drucilla Cornell are working towards displacing the infrastructure that generates binary constructions.⁹³

Clearly, Derrida's comments are dated and his knowledge of feminism (in this instance) is limited. Nonetheless, his discussion of the feminine is useful and should not be overlooked. For instance, Derrida employs the concept of the feminine to illustrate the illusory nature of phallogocentrism. Like Irigaray, he asserts it is because 'woman' is outside of symbolic representation that the feminine is an undecidable. The feminine, according to Derrida, is the precondition for the phallogocentric symbolic order. Like other undecidables (trace, supplement), 'woman' is used to show how the current symbolic order is maintained on the forced exclusion of women. 'Woman' is reduced to an order of sameness with men – although with a 'feminine' difference that renders her *always already* inferior in a hierarchical and asymmetrical binary system of meanings. To reveal that it is the concept of 'the feminine' in phallogocentric discourse that makes this order possible is one of the radical gestures of deconstruction. To show the feminine in this symbolic order, or how the feminine guarantees its logic, is to subvert the logic that keeps it in place. In this way, it is possible to reveal the violence and dissimulation necessary to uphold logocentrism, the patriarchal symbolic order, and the illusion of the centred, fully knowing subject. The logic of non-contradiction is challenged. Derrida's use of 'the feminine' shows how the ground for the metaphysical assumptions that underpin the patriarchal symbolic order is undecidable or unstable. He is not interested in producing an "unmarked generic humanity", as Rawlinson suggested in

⁹³ The following chapter will present some examples of Australian feminists who are also working with deconstruction.

her objection to deconstruction (Rawlinson 1997, p 80). Rather, like Irigaray, he is moving away from defining woman with reference to a masculine norm.

According to Derrida, women are in an excellent position to challenge the metaphysics of presence because of their subordinate position. Jagger claims that:

We need to recognise it [Derrida's feminine] also as a morphology. Then we can see Derrida's use of the figure of woman as an act of naming that is not an act of *appropriation* as in the usual phallogocentric sense. Displaying and reinscribing the term 'woman' as a mark in the chain of *differánce*, writing etc. is an attempt to avoid the violence of *appropriation* and *expropriation* which characterizes the phallogocentric act of naming (Jagger 1996, p 195, author's emphasis).

Differánce offers feminism a way of thinking sexual difference that does not deny differences and at the same time does not create false hierarchies. For these reasons, to try to hold onto the name 'woman' is counterproductive. Indeed, Spivak suggests that the name 'woman', as representative of an essential category of subjecthood, is based on "precariously sketched, basically essentialist historical generalizations" (Spivak 1989, p 216). Therefore, Spivak states that feminists:

[C]annot claim both the desire to identify with the oppression of woman in terms of an ontological deception, and the desire for the right to an impasse, to a deconstructive feminism which would take women as a name for the graphemic⁹⁴ structures and the non-truth of truth. We have to give up the one or the other. I would propose that we would not share this anxiety for the name, we should not identify the guarding of the question. With *this* particular name. This would allow us to use the ontological and epistemological critiques found in deconstruction (and indeed psychoanalysis) and appreciate poststructuralist 'nominalism'. We must remember that *this particular name*, the name of 'woman', misfires for feminism. Yet, a feminism that takes the traditionalist line *against* deconstruction – falls into a historical determinism where 'history' becomes a gender-fetish (Spivak 1989, p 217, author's emphasis).

It is within this context that Derrida claims that:

There is no such thing as the essence of woman because woman averts, she is averted of herself. Out of the depths, endless and unfathomable, she engulfs and distorts all vestige of essentiality, of identity, of property. There is no such thing as the truth of woman, but it is because of that abyssal divergence of the truth, because that untruth is «truth.» Woman is but one name for the untruth of truth (Derrida 1978, p 51).

Derrida's point is that 'woman' cannot be trapped by the metaphysics of presence because she is connected with distance. Distance, in the Nietzschean sense, understood as inconspicuous, apparently submerged but highly explosive, in that it

⁹⁴ Graphemic draws on *graphein*, a Greek word meaning a graphic system – in this instance Spivak is referring to the written trace.

has the potential to destroy traditional morality while at the same time asserting a playful gayness (Derrida 1978). The name woman is clearly in opposition to logocentrism's focus on presence and immediacy (Hekman 1990, p 167). For Drucilla Cornell, woman (limited to meanings created within a male symbolic order) "is ineradicably associated with the question of how to adequately address the 'real' alterity of the other, an alterity which is by definition beyond the masculine symbolic" (Cornell 1997, p 195).

For Spivak, the political dilemma for deconstruction is whether or not it can disrupt the "ethnocentric Subject from establishing itself by selectively defining an Other" (Spivak 1988, p 292). Derrida develops a thesis that echoes Levinasian ethics in its attempt to move deconstruction towards the political. According to Cornell:

In Levinas, my responsibility to the Other demands that I guard her alterity against her appropriation by any system of cognition including a system of morality when it is established as moral law. ... For Levinas, the Good, which provides the sanctity for the Other, can never be reduced to a set of commandments because the Other calls me only as herself. Since her call is unique to her, how to heed it cannot be known in advance or simply through her identification with me as another moral subject. To reduce her to a set of definable categories would violate her alterity (Cornell 1997, p 162).

Since the Other can never be fully known it would be a violence to reduce her to 'an economy of sameness'. By constantly re-inventing the other, by working through the past, the not yet or the 'to come', will necessarily be affected. Therefore, there can be no way of knowing what the future will be, the instability of language and political processes as they establish and destabilize meaning, will necessarily affect change. According to Derrida, "'we' will become something other; our response to the other will reinvent 'us'" (Derrida 1992a, p 342). Indeed, what needs to be thought is not another theory explaining the 'true' nature of the 'subject', looking for metaphysical truths, but a challenge to the rules that govern the performance of 'the subject'. Otherwise, oppressed peoples will fall into the naturalizing tendencies of the subject, which will once again oppress them. Consequently, it is important to be vigilant against the naturalizing tendency of 'the subject', especially theories of the subject which rely on a fixed (at any point) notion of what it means to be a subject – therefore once again limiting or repeating dominant discourses. According to Mohanty:

It is the exercise of violence in creating a legitimate *inside* and an illegitimate *outside* in the name of identity ... – or, in other words, the exercise of violence when unity or coalition is confused with home and used to enforce a premature sisterhood or solidarity (Mohanty 1992, p 85–86, author's emphasis).

Moreover, she claims that “the experience of being woman can create an illusory unity, for it is not the experience of being woman, but the meanings attached to gender, race, class and age at various historical moments that is of strategic significance” (Mohanty 1992, p 86).

Fixed categories need to be deconstructed, otherwise women take up subject positions – within a political order in which the masculine/feminine binary operates – that position them as ‘almost the same, but different’ (and inferior).

This section demonstrated that Derrida's use of the term woman as an undecidable is not intended to devalue or displace women, but to re-think the logic that privileges the masculine in the binary man/woman.

From the above, however, it is not altogether clear how deconstruction could be political. What follows is an exposition of the political dimensions of deconstruction. However, first it is useful to briefly comment on feminist interpretations of J L Austin's speech act theory, especially in relation to Derrida's reading. Drawing on speech act theory, Derrida focuses on the distinction between the performative and constative dimensions of language. A performative statement, according to Butler (and borrowing from Austin), “enacts or produces that which it names” (Butler 1994, p 23).⁹⁵ In his critique of Austin, Derrida concludes that a performative statement will only succeed if it links citation with repetition (Derrida 1982, p 325). In other words, Derrida claims that a performative utterance cannot

⁹⁵ Christopher Norris, elaborates:

According to Austin, language serves a great variety of purposes, not all of which are accountable as statements of fact or logical entailment. It can be used to *perform* certain kinds of rhetorical acts like promising, declaring a couple man and wife, or ritually naming some object or other. ... Performatives involve an intention and a commitment, on the speaker's part, to stand by his words and acknowledge (at least as he utters them) all the obligations they entail (Norris 1991, p 109).

succeed if its formulation did not trigger a sense of recognition by tapping into an already coded 'iterable utterance' (Derrida 1982).⁹⁶ Therefore, according to Derrida:

iterability is at once that which tends to attain plenitude and that which bars access to it. Through the possibility of repeating every mark as the same it makes way for an idealization that seems to deliver the full presences of ideal objects (not present in the mode of sense perception and beyond all immediate deictics),⁹⁷ but this repeatability itself ensures that the full presence of a singularity thus repeated comports in itself the reference to something else, thus rendering the full presence that it nevertheless announces. This is why iteration is not simply repetition (Derrida 1989b, p 129).

The power of a performative utterance – for example, “the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage” (that is, not a statement of fact) (Derrida 1982, p 326) comes, not from an autonomous agent’s intention, but from the performative’s “capacity to draw on and re-encode the historicity of those conventions in a present act” (Butler 1995, p 134). That is, the power of a performative utterance does not come from the individual agent that utters it, but from its (the utterance’s) ability to draw on already established conventions. However, as Terry Threadgold notes:

Derrida argued that Austin saw the *conventionality* of the contexts in which statements were made but failed to understand the ‘intrinsic conventionality of locution itself’. This was the circumstance which impelled Derrida to theorise *iterativity*, to place the focus firmly back onto the structure and form of the utterance, which must be iterable to be comprehensible. Iteration was a term which recognised this but which also deconstructed the opposition between repetitions and instability. But Derrida did not stop there. He was, and always has been, concerned primarily with disrupting citationality, the iteration of deeply embedded understandings (Threadgold 2000b, p 56, author’s emphasis).

Hence, Threadgold claims that Derrida questions the ability of any repetition to be an exact, or ‘true’, repetition. For instance, Stanley Fish presents an excellent example in *With the Compliments of the Author: Reflections on Austin and Derrida* (1989). Here, Fish discusses how the author’s intention, in this case Derrida’s, behind the statement “with the compliments of the author”, can be read in several ways. In other words, while this statement is comprehensible its meaning is not altogether clear – it requires interpretation. Moreover, Fish suggests that the presence of the

⁹⁶ For a detailed explanation of ‘iterability’ as Derrida understands it, see *Signature Event Context in Margins of Philosophy* (Derrida 1982, p 307-330).

⁹⁷ Deictic refers to “a word which shows or points out directly another part of the statement in which it occurs. In ‘the artist dropped his brush; his hands shook,’ ‘his’ is a deictic. Similarly, ‘this,’ ‘that,’ ‘these’ and ‘those’ are deictics” (Belton 2002).

author or the speaker does not lessen the number of ways in which this statement could be read. According to Fish:

I would want to know in what *spirit* Derrida had sent me his book. I might still suspect that he was being ironic rather than complimentary. The point is not that I could never be certain about the meaning of WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF THE AUTHOR but that neither the achievement of certainty nor the failure to achieve it will have a necessary relationship to the fact of physical proximity. The fact of face-to-face exchange, then, is no assurance that communication will be certain or even relatively trouble free (Fish 1982, p 42).

Derrida focuses on the performative aspect of language in order to propel deconstruction away from a determinist (negative) model towards an affirmative, or ethically engaged, model. Through repetition, or performative iteration, Derrida is able to show that:

Every performative presupposed conventions and institutional rules – but by bending these rules with respect to the rules themselves in order to allow the other to come or to announce its coming in the opening of this dehiscence.⁹⁸ That is perhaps what we call deconstruction (Derrida 1992a, p 340).

In order to interrupt the performative, Derrida claims that it is not sufficient to just highlight the unstable structures that keep the metaphysics of presence in place (in language). Rather, the way to affect change is by working from within the text to trouble and make it impossible to keep repeating the metaphysics of presence's desire for "an economy of sameness" (Oliver 1998, p 111-113). Derrida does not claim that the aim of deconstruction is 'ideological demystification'. On the contrary, it is because ideological demystification is not possible that he insists that deconstruction is an infinite process; it cannot be a static, or a one-off, project. He maintains that the future, what he calls the 'to come' will necessarily be affected by a constant re-invention of the other, which refuses to be trapped inside the cycle of sameness.

Thus far, this chapter has discussed the possibilities of deconstruction, both theoretically and practically. It is within this context that an overt discussion of the politics of deconstruction will continue by drawing on Derrida's own understanding of 'politics'.

⁹⁸ The definition of 'dehiscent' according to the Oxford Dictionary is "gaping, bursting open" (Oxford Dictionary 1976, p 217).

The Politics of Deconstruction

Deconstruction has also been criticised for an assumed inability to inform political change at a grassroots level. In “Derrida and the Limits of Philosophy” (1986b), Elizabeth Gross maps some of the early criticism against deconstruction, most of which she thinks stems from a misreading of Derrida. For instance, she notes that some feminists (falsely) accuse deconstruction of having no relevance to grassroots movements. Gross sums up their criticism:

[According to some critics] while Derrida’s playful interrogation of philosophical texts may have relevance and importance in challenging certain intellectual and academic practices it remains elitist and unrelated to power struggles that function on a more everyday level (Gross 1986b, p 37).

This position is taken up strongly by Robyn Rowland who points to some of the problems with feminism becoming ‘academic in its limited sense’ (Rowland 1987, p 521). Rowland asks whether “doing theory is just a particular kind of bonding ritual for academic privileged women”? (Rowland 1987, p 522). For some feminists, the issue with poststructuralism, or any theory, is that it takes feminism away from its political priority, which for feminists like Rowland should always come first:

This objectification of women’s studies as an academic subject can lead to the negligence of our roots once again in the women’s movement. It may lead us to forget accountability and revolutionary struggle. Perhaps we should strive to integrate refresher courses in the women’s movement into teaching; for us to return to the front lines periodically, for example, to the refuges, in order to remember that we ultimately must relate to action! (Rowland 1987, p 521).

The tension between deconstruction and the political has also been addressed by Spivak. She identifies a tension in her use of deconstruction as a theoretical model and the ‘absurdity’ of any practico-political application:

The position of academic feminism in the elite universities in the two Indian cities where I worked was so strikingly different from the United States, where I habitually teach. And I am not given to unquestioning benevolence towards that dubious category – ‘Third World women’. Yet, there was produced in me, not infrequently during my time in India, ‘a heightened sense of the absurdity of my theoretical pursuits’. When I spoke in Cambridge in response to Teresa Brennan’s invitation; immediately after leaving India, I found myself reconsidering the relationship between feminism and deconstruction in terms of that sense of absurdity (Spivak 1989, p 209).

Certainly, deconstruction cannot offer an immediate ‘fix’ to what are very complicated problems.⁹⁹ However, the following section hopes to highlight what can be achieved by viewing deconstruction as a politics.

Deconstruction and ‘Politics’

I [Derrida] don’t think that there is such a thing as a deconstructive politics, if by the name ‘politics’ we mean a programme, an agenda, or even the name of a regime (Derrida and Bennington 1997).

In the *Politics of Friendship* (1997) and *Spectres of Marx* (1994), Derrida explicitly addresses deconstruction and its connection to the political. For Derrida, politics is inextricably tied up with concepts such as friendship, hospitality, the gift, and democracy. From the above quote, it is clear that the way in which Derrida understands the political is particular. According to Elizabeth Grosz:

I [Grosz] would argue that his [Derrida’s] are among the most intensely political texts of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, though the language he uses is not one he shares with most versions of political and especially feminist theory (Grosz 2005, p 56).

The potential for political change is tied to the fact that, by necessity, subjects operate within an economy of violence. By violence Derrida is referring to the materiality of language and its effects – especially on others. Deconstruction shows us that all texts are violent because they are sites of exclusion.¹⁰⁰ To work within the system (which is the only possible place to work), means that it is impossible to altogether avoid repeating violence, no matter how noble the intentions. Derrida’s discussion of a metaphysics of presence shows that judgements are made in order to uphold binary structures – Saussure’s pathological refusal to acknowledge writing as an integral part of language is an act of overt violence. A more practical example can be seen in the way in which western Law operates. The subject of western law

⁹⁹ For an example of a contemporary political *application* of deconstruction, see Derrida *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2001b).

¹⁰⁰ By text Derrida means more than just the written word. I refer to his controversial statement and its misrepresentation: “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” translated as “there is no outside-text” or more commonly “There is nothing outside the text” (Derrida 1976, p 158). This statement suggests that, because we are implicated in the very structures we are deconstructing, transparency (presence) will never be possible. In *Limited Inc.* (Derrida 1989) this statement is translated more accurately as “there is nothing outside of context” (p 136). Moreover, as Geoffrey Bennington claims “from the moment one manages to read a text, even at a level of elementary decipherment, one is, however minimally, part of its context” (Derrida and Bennington 1997, p 91).

pertains to ‘the reasonable man’, a universal figure that in theory is gender, race and class neutral, but in practice is implicitly white, Christian, heterosexual, and male. This ‘man’ is a fiction that excludes many, including women, the culturally diverse, homosexual/queer, and people of colour. To maintain the Law (which is thought to be universal and natural) certain groups, who are excluded from the normative structures of the law are forced to become ‘the same’ in order to fit into this model or are marked as deviant. For instance, in 1991 in Canada (Alberta), a court ruled that women on maternity leave are “considered disabled for an indiscriminate amount of time after delivery” (Felix 1996, p 75). Indeed, Felix goes on to say that “under federal legislation [most companies] have chosen to give all female employees 6 weeks of disability coverage after a birth” (Felix 1996, p 75). Thus, because the law cannot recognize the specificities of women’s bodies – the male body acts as the norm – pregnancy is marked as a disability. Instead of equality, Cornell suggests that women strive for “equivalent rights” founded on principles of “capability and wellbeing” (Cornell 1992a). She stresses the need for “the reconceptualization of equality beyond the likeness model” (Cornell 1992a, p 288). Otherwise, as the example above shows, differences (from the ‘male norm’) will either be judged as deviant, or “obliterated” altogether (Cornell 1992a, p 292).

For political change to occur, violence (in Derridean terms) must first be identified and (constantly) re–invented (reduced), or transformed. For Derrida:

no political protocol, no rhetorical or intellectual ploy is simply innocent, motivated by reason, knowledge, or truth alone, but carries with it an inherent undecidability, an inherent iterability or repeatability that recontextualizes it and frees it from any specifiable or definitive origin or end (Grosz 2005, p 59).

Derrida claims that all laws are violent. In fact, no law can be so neutral as to cause no violence. The danger of instituting law as natural is that law forgets its originary violence. For instance, Kant instituted natural and absolute (categorical) ethical principles, which he claimed originate from pure reason, not from conscience or utility (Miller 1993). The *aporia* of law demonstrates the impossibility of ever finding the origin of law. This means that any law that is instituted by reason of its ‘naturalness’ can only be sustained through violence. If laws were natural it would not be necessary to put into place multiple laws to uphold them (by suppressing what they are trying to control).

Derrida uses concepts, such as trace (an effect of *arche* writing), to minimise violence by creating a space for that which is deliberately not acknowledged, such as writing. For Derrida, it is important to think through the implications of the violence in order to minimise it. Beardsworth shows how trace does this:

As the rewriting of the internal space of linguistics, of the exclusions which it perforce makes to institute this space, and of the contradictions which these very exclusions engender, the instituted trace accounts for these three movements: first, the foundation of a disciplinary space; second, its constitutive exclusions; and, third, the return of that which is excluded within the disciplinary space (Beardsworth 1996, p 13).

Thus, the trace defies the logic of non-contradiction, as it is neither empirical nor transcendental. It does not support a qualitative distinction between the worldly (writing) and the non-worldly (speech): for the instituted trace cannot be fixed to an entity, yet it cannot be separated from an entity. In Derrida's words:

The instituted trace cannot be thought without thinking the retention of difference within a structure of reference where difference appears *as such* and thus permits a certain liberty of variations among the full terms ... The trace must be thought before the entity. But the movement of the trace is necessarily occulted [repressed], it produces itself as self-occultation. When the other announces itself as such, it presents itself in the dissimulation of itself. This formulation is not theological, as one might believe somewhat hastily. The 'theological' is a determined movement in the total movement of the trace. The field of the entity, before being determined as the field of presence, is structured according to the diverse possibilities – genetic and structural – of the trace. The presentation of the other as such, that is to say the dissimulation of its 'as such', has already begun and no structure of the entity escapes it (Derrida 1976, p 46–47).

Derrida's terms – trace, supplement, *differánce* and so on – challenge distinctions between the transcendental and the empirical. The space in which they occur is somewhere in-between, what Derrida calls the *khôra*. This space cannot be reduced, either temporally or spatially. Due to the fluidity of these concepts they cannot be fixed and, therefore, cannot be used as a *telos* for action. This understanding destabilises the way in which to think 'the political'. For this reason (the 'undecidability' of deconstruction), deconstruction cannot be used as a political tool when relying on common sense understandings of 'the political'. On the contrary, what needs to be explored or deconstructed are these common understandings of the political. Beardsworth elaborates:

Here emerges the political dimension to Derridean thinking – as an account of the institution as violence, and, in the recognition of necessary violence, of a transformative renegotiation of the institution in terms of a 'lesser violence'. In other words, Derrida's account of the mark in terms of a tertiary structure of violence recognizes the necessity of violence in such a way that the terms of this violence can be transformed (Beardsworth 1996, p 19–20).

To acknowledge contradiction (in language) is to recognize that there is no natural status in language. A decision is always needed, “and that given the irreducibility of a decision, there are different kinds of decisions – those that recognize their legislative and executive force and those which hide it under some claim to naturalness *qua* ‘theory’ or ‘objective science’” (Beardsworth 1996, p 12). For instance, legislation used to exist in Australia that states that employers need not pay women (in the same position) the equivalent paid to men. The argument for this inequality, instituted through legislation, is not because of any discrimination against women *per se*, or misogyny on the part of the authors, but objective theories raised to demonstrate that men worked more efficiently than women, or that men’s work was more skilled and so on (Cutcher 2001).¹⁰¹

To recognize the violence inherent in the binary man/woman is to open up the possibility for review, that is, a review of the above legislation would require a close look at the way in which women are constructed (in the text) and how that construction works to their advantage or disadvantage. There is no natural status in the binary man/woman. Once this is recognized, it is easier to see the violence necessary to argue that men should be paid more, by virtue of being men, and not because of any number of rationalizations. The binary man/woman is so entrenched in western thought systems that it is impossible (especially on one reading) to identify and reduce all instances of violence. However, recognizing and deconstructing the violence in binaries works towards producing less violent representations. This is the argument of a ‘lesser violence’ in a general economy of violence, what Drucilla Cornell recognizes as the radical nature of deconstruction.¹⁰²

Thus, for Derrida, democracy is far more than a regime, or a political program. Democracy is ‘to come’ it cannot be located, as by definition it means, at the very least, equality. However, the difficulty is that “you have to reconcile this demand for equality with the demand for singularity, with respect for the Other as singular”: therein lies the *aporia* (Derrida and Bennington 1997).

¹⁰¹ Also important was the Harvester Judgement of 1907. Justice Higgins, a Commonwealth Arbitration Court judge, ruled that men were to be paid a ‘family wage’ as they had dependants to support. Working women, on the other hand, supposedly had no dependants and therefore required less remuneration. For more information see Ann Curthoys (1988, p 37-39).

¹⁰² Gayatri Spivak refers to “revolutions that as yet have no model” (Spivak 1980, p 29).

So when I speak of a 'democracy to come', I don't mean a future democracy, a new regime, a new organisation of nation-states (although this may be hoped for) but I mean this 'to come': the promise of an authentic democracy which is never embodied in what we call democracy (Derrida and Bennington 1997).

The promise of a democracy to come is an affirmation, and a yet to be thought. This understanding of democracy is linked to the *arrivant*, to the stranger who is monstrous.¹⁰³ The *arrivant*, or the stranger, is monstrous because he/she has no name and no identity. In *Spectres of Marx* Derrida says that welcoming the *arrivant* "must be absolute hospitality, the 'yes' to the *arrivant(e)*, the 'come' to the future that cannot be anticipated" (Derrida 1994, p 168). In order to open up your home and yourself to the *arrivant* you must offer the gift of hospitality, not needing to ask if he/she is a terrorist or a coloniser, because the *arrivant* is neither. According to Derrida:

The future is the opening in which the other happens [*arrive*], and it is the value of the other or of alterity that, ultimately, would be the justification. Ultimately, this is my way of interpreting the messianic. The other may come, or he [sic] may not. I don't want to programme him, but rather to leave a place for him to come if he comes. It is the ethic of hospitality (Derrida 2001a, p 83).

Friendship is a very complex notion, which is closely tied to hospitality and the gift. What model of friendship can be useful in a political context? For Derrida, friendship is understood in an Aristotelian sense, or what Derrida calls the Greek sense, as *philía*: a friendship that does not require reciprocity or conditionality (Derrida 1997, p 63). This is a problematic term for feminism. Friendship, as *philía*, is engendered with notions of brotherhood and patriarchal domination, which serves as the basis for the western social contract on which democracy is premised. Derrida concedes that this is precisely why both terms, friendship and politics, need to be re-thought. However, in order to re-think them, it is impossible to overlook them.

Derrida's concepts *aporia* and promise are also useful for exploring more specifically how deconstruction can move beyond the need for fixed categories – with the potential of affecting political change. Within 'aporia' and 'promise' Derrida locates both the necessity of judgement and the promise of the future. Literally *aporia* means "an absence of path ... the immobilisation of thinking, the

¹⁰³ By monstrosity Derrida means: "A monstrosity can only be 'mis-known' (*meconnue*), that is, unrecognized and misunderstood. It can only be recognized afterwards when it has become normal or the norm" (Derrida 1990, p 79).

impossibility of advancing” (Derrida 1986b, p 132). However, for Derrida, it also “gives or promises the thinking of the path, provokes the thinking of the very possibility of what still remains unthinkable or unthought, indeed, impossible” (Derrida 1986b, p 132). Impossibility and *aporia* are not negative or nihilistic words for Derrida. He claims that one only starts thinking at the point of impossibility (Derrida 1999). *Aporia* does not signal a *telos*, rather, at the point of *aporia* it is impossible to know what, if anything, will result. Therefore, Derrida speaks of the not yet/to come rather than the future, as the word future becomes reducible to the present. The not yet/to come is entirely unknown, contingent and unexpected; uncertainty should not be under control. It refers to an altogether different future based on what has been precluded in the past and present. Such is the nature of the future: a promise that there is a future. According to Derrida:

Well, what remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, a certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion (Derrida 1994, p 59).

It is within this context that Barbara Johnson states:

The profound political intervention of feminism has indeed been not simply to enact a radical politics but to redefine the very nature of what is deemed political – to take politics down from its male incarnation as a change-seeking interest in what is *not* nearest at hand, and to bring it into the daily historical texture of the relations between the sexes (Johnson 1987, p 31, author’s emphasis).

Going back to earlier arguments by some feminists, like Benhabib and Rowland, politics is seen to be impossible without subjects who act collectively, uniting against a common struggle. In other words, there is an argument that for feminists to be effective politically, the subject needs to be understood in terms of an identity based on similarities, that is, one that does not recognize contradictions, or at least can defer them for the purpose of the struggle by uniting in strategic alliances to act for change, for example by deploying Spivak’s notion of ‘strategic essentialism’ (Spivak 1988). Or, in Derridean terms, the effacement of the other is necessary in order to maintain the assumption of autonomous self-present subjectivity indicative of a metaphysics of presence. Mostly, women (inside an identity politics paradigm) are asked to unite around common issues, usually based on appeals to the natural, biological or social function of ‘women’ (Elam 1994). Since the 1980s, most battles for equality have been waged (and won) using this type of paradigm. While these wins are significant, they have operated within a sameness/difference model that also

reinforces a reified/essentialised 'woman'. Moreover, what is often not acknowledged is that within these collectives is a hierarchy of oppression. On the other hand, the point of deconstruction is not to reverse subject positions (this is a self-defeating project), but to "make the subject recognize the other in herself/himself" (Yegenoglu 1998, p 9).

Conclusion

This chapter argues that deconstruction cannot be reduced merely to a literary device, nor can it be said to be at the service of patriarchy (albeit a subtle form). As this chapter has shown, both these criticisms are entirely unsatisfactory in dismissing deconstruction. Deconstruction does not appropriate 'the feminine' or hijack the word 'woman' for masculine purposes, rather it problematises the need for fixed categories that ultimately support a system that can only repress those represented by it. Moreover, deconstruction has the potential for redefining the political in a way that opens the door to a future that is ethical in its indeterminacy.

There is an imperative that feminism recognize the potential of deconstruction. Indeed feminists inside and outside of the academy have taken up this imperative.¹⁰⁴ However, as Ermarth states:

Postmodernity offers to women precisely the opportunity to redefine problems of identity and agency in terms suitable to their experience. It would be ironic, though not without precedent, for feminists now to deflect an opportunity that has been so patiently built (Ermarth 2000, p 117).

At this point in history, feminism is struggling to move outside of male symbolic representation as well as struggling for equal pay and childcare facilities. This is precisely where deconstruction, as a logic of supplementarity, can be useful. Moreover, feminists are utilising insights from deconstruction to represent women as political 'subjects' that challenge previous fixed notions of 'the political' and 'the subject'. This chapter demonstrates the ways in which deconstruction begins to

¹⁰⁴ The next two chapters will explore in more detail the ways that academic feminists in Australia have taken up deconstruction.

rethink feminist agendas. In the words of Derrida, “Deconstruction is not *neutral*. It *intervenes*” (Derrida 1981a, p 93).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ For example see Derrida’s commentary on asylum seekers and on the violation of human rights (2001b; 2003).

Chapter 4: Women's Studies in the Academy

Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands.

Jane Austen (1946 [1818])

Introduction

This chapter looks at the conditions framing Australian feminists' work in deconstruction in Women's Studies programs in Australian universities. The focus in this chapter is on feminism, or more specifically Women's Studies, as a destabilizing element in the university; attention is directed to feminism's allies as well as its opponents. An investigation of the way in which Women's Studies was established in Australian Universities highlights the resistance to Women's Studies as an academic knowledge.

Early Women's Studies was closely tied to the Women's Liberation Movement and for that reason many of the early courses reflected the Women's Liberation Movement's political project. The debates of the 1980s and 1990s around the purpose of Women's Studies reflect the tension between alliances with the Women's Liberation Movement and Women's Studies as an academic discipline. This chapter argues that, while some feminists from the Women's Liberation Movement were uncomfortable with Women's Studies drawing on Marxist or radical feminist theories for their critique, this apprehension was exacerbated with the introduction of poststructuralist theories. Thus, this chapter argues that feminists in the academy, who had strong ties with the Women's Liberation Movement, were reluctant to accept or incorporate poststructuralist theories. As a consequence, alliances between poststructuralist academics and activists are uneasy, and, one could argue, limited, not only in Australia but other parts of the world.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ For one international example, there are some similarities between Women's Studies in Australia and Ireland. See Davey and Schippers (2002) for an account of Women's Studies and its impact on grassroots movements in Ireland.

Like all narratives, this account is partial and arbitrary.¹⁰⁷ However, it does provide a framework for the next chapter that will look at the theoretical, rather than institutional, issues within Women's Studies.

By way of background this chapter will provide an overview of tertiary education in Australia. This will be followed by an introduction of the Women's Liberation Movement in relation to its influence on Women's Studies in the university. To highlight the resistance to Women's Studies in the academy, reference is made to specific examples of the way Women's Studies was established in some universities. Then, by looking at some models of Women's Studies, a discussion of the way in which Women's Studies is organised in the universities will provide a frame in which to position deconstruction. Finally an argument is made that the name change from Women's Studies to Gender Studies galvanized the divisions between so called 'modern' and poststructuralist feminists.

Overview of Tertiary Education in Australia (1960-1990)

Up until 1960 there were seven universities and five Institutes of Technology in Australia. In the 1960s, Australian universities increased their numbers from seven to seventeen (Franklin 1999, p 1). In addition, seventy-two colleges of advanced education (CAE) were set up around Australia in the early 1970s. Between the 1960s and 1990, tertiary education in Australia was organised around a hierarchical tripartite system: Universities (offering higher degrees and promoting 'pure research'), CAEs (offering vocational training, with the highest qualification being a Graduate Diploma), and Institutes of Technology (offering technical training with applied higher degrees available). The role of the CAEs was to teach vocational courses or para-professional courses, for instance in teaching, wildlife and parks management, librarianship, journalism and so on, while the role of the universities was to provide a professional or 'classic' education (Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science and so on, as well as 'pure' research higher degrees). Women's Studies courses were taught across the system, with a divide between

¹⁰⁷ By constructing a narrative from the vantage point of the present that attempts to represent the past, it is necessary to give the movement a coherence that was not present at the time.

CAEs and universities that included content as well as purpose. Women's Studies courses started to appear across the sector in the early 1970s.¹⁰⁸ According to Jean Curthoys, in 1973 there were three Women's Studies courses in Australia; however by 1975 there were at least forty courses taught throughout Australia (Curthoys 1975, p 6). The introduction of these courses was not always straightforward. For instance, the courses in Flinders University, Queensland University and Sydney University – the first universities to teach Women's Studies – were established against considerable opposition (Ryan 1975a, p 5).

Women's Liberation Movement

The women's movement is part of the network that provided the conditions that made Women's Studies possible. The Women's Liberation Movement was founded in Sydney in the summer of 1969 (Reade 1994, p 202). Although some academics would dispute this broad claim; Marian Lowe and Margaret Benston note that Women's Studies came “directly out of the women's movement” (Lowe and Benston 1991, p 48). Or in Renate Klein's words, Women's Studies was “the educational arm of the Women's Liberation Movement” (Klein 1991, p 125).¹⁰⁹ Conferences held by the Women's Liberation Movement focused on the political: “feminism and socialism, feminism and anarchism, feminism and Marxism, women and labour” (Magarey and Sheridan 2002, p 129).¹¹⁰ Therefore, a “move from the streets to the classroom” was seen by some feminists as a way of broadening feminism's political reach (Klein 1991, p 125). Not everybody agreed that feminism would be best served by, or in, the academy. There are feminists who claimed that the Women's Liberation Movement would not be helped by investing in a patriarchal institution,

¹⁰⁸ Women's Studies began as one subject that ran for the semester – mainly in departments of sociology, history, literature and politics. Degree programs were introduced in 1978 within the CAEs and Institutes. At this time universities accepted higher degree students in Women's Studies, this enabled more theoretical research.

¹⁰⁹ See also Phillipa Rothfield who claims that the Women's Liberation Movement “inspired the theoretical and scholarly pursuit which we now call (academic) feminism” (Rothfield 1987, p 525), and Magarey and Sheridan (2002, p 129) who also saw Women's Studies as a tool for the Women's Movement.

¹¹⁰ It is also important to mention the ‘Women and Education’ and ‘Girls and Education’ Conferences that began in 1974, as these spurred much Education Department sponsored curriculum development across the nation. These conferences were largely funded by State Government Education Departments.

like the university. The dilemma concerned whether feminism, as articulated within the Women's Liberation Movement, could transform the patriarchal nature of knowledge or whether women's liberation would be tamed and transformed by patriarchal knowledge. The anxiety that lay behind these sentiments is echoed and reinforced in more recent arguments about the elite nature of some feminist theory.

There were those who believed that Women's Studies owed a debt to the Women's Liberation Movement. Therefore, for some feminists the aim of Women's Studies programs should be to reflect the aims of the Women's Liberation Movement.¹¹¹ There was a high investment in a particular reading of feminism in Australia in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Robyn Rowland, who directed a popular Women's Studies degree program at Deakin University, was an important voice for Women's Liberation within the academy:

The central issue of importance when considering the aims of women's studies and feminist scholarship is that women's studies came from the women's *liberation* movement – and I do not mean the 'women's movement', as it is now titled, stripping it of revolutionary intent. ... at the base, if we lose touch with or fail to be accountable to the basic concept of changing women's oppression, we betray that source of strength – the women's liberation movement (Rowland 1987, p 519).

Appeals to 'liberation' and 'revolution' are indebted to socialist and radical feminist perspectives or to a combination of both.¹¹² Initially, despite the citation of Robyn Rowland's radical feminist approach above, almost all of the relationships between the Women's Liberation Movement and Women's Studies in the university claimed a socialist praxis.

Several key concerns of the Women's Liberation Movement led to the theorization of subjectivity. According to feminist philosopher Philipa Rothfield, the Women's Liberation Movement considered subjective transformation (consciousness raising) an important political goal (Rothfield 1990, p 127).¹¹³ The Women's Liberation Movement was steeped in a socialist feminist political philosophy, which assumed a

¹¹¹ While the women's movement and academic feminism had, in some instances, different priorities it is not fair to say that they operate as a binary (academic versus grassroots). Both Jean Curthoys (1997) and Gisela Kaplan (1996) allude to such a division. Following Margaret Henderson (2000, p 115) this chapter hopes to offer a more complex relationship.

¹¹² The main difference between Marxist and Socialist feminists is in the focus, which has moved away from class as the central issue to gender as the central issue (Tong 1989, p 39) – moreover contemporary Marxist feminism is infused with radical and psychoanalytic theories.

¹¹³ See Chapter 2 for more detail on the changing direction of the subject of feminism.

humanist subject. However, as will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, dissatisfaction with the humanist subject “as an autonomous self-constitutive being” led to an interest in anti-humanist philosophies, including deconstruction (Rothfield 1990, p 132). Thus, a ‘new’ critique was developed, drawing on an anti-humanist philosophical critique, that addressed essentialist arguments based on a masculine/feminine binary.

What follows is a selection of specific examples of some of the problems feminists had in establishing Women’s Studies in the university sector. While these examples are specific to individual institutions they share common characteristics and are typical of Women’s Studies in the early days, including obstacles put up by other staff, internal disputes among feminists, suspicion of Women’s Studies as a legitimate knowledge, and administrative issues. The difficulties confronting feminists in establishing Women’s Studies as a legitimate field of knowledge influenced the theoretical content of courses as well as the role academic feminism played in the broader community. These antecedents form the landscape on which deconstruction either developed in, or was fought against, both as a theoretical tool and as a form of politics.

Women’s Studies: A Collection of Fragments

While some women attended university as early as the late 1880s,¹¹⁴ it was not until the early 1970s that women entered the university sector in large numbers. The influx of women into the university is mainly attributed to the abolition of fees by the Whitlam Labor Government (1972-1975) (Magarey and Sheridan 2002, p 130).¹¹⁵ The abolition of fees also enabled more working class men and women to enter into the university, thus making it less elitist.

¹¹⁴Amidst some controversy women entered the medical faculties of Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide Universities in the late 1880s (Bashford 1998, p 221-225).

¹¹⁵ The opening up of the universities was not only good for women, but for poor intellectuals. Anne Coombs claims that many associated with the Sydney ‘Push’ took the opportunity to enrol at Sydney University in “film, the arts or into journalism” (Coombs 1996, p 303). Some of these people were later involved with Cultural Studies.

From the outset, academic feminists have struggled to be accepted both within and outside of the academy. Ever since its introduction into the university in the mid 1970s Women's Studies was considered to be incompatible with the university system by some feminists outside the academy and by some academics (mostly male) (Lowe and Benston 1991, p 51).¹¹⁶ Some feminists from the 'movement' thought of Women's Studies as 'an oxymoron', as its position in the university meant that it acted against the principles of collectivity, nurturance and the privileging of experience (Bulbeck 1994, p 120). Many feminists within the university, however, took advantage of the higher education reforms, the opening of the tertiary sector, the Labor government's support for inclusiveness within education, to argue for new learning objectives that could encompass feminist values (a non-graded pass system, student-centred learning, formative evaluation and group work among them).

The introduction of Women's Studies into the university was contested because of the institutional history of the university, both as a guardian of (traditional) knowledge and the radical challenge posed by Women's Studies. For some non-feminist academics, Women's Studies' overtly political goals clashed with the university ethos, which claimed to produce 'objective knowledge'.¹¹⁷ Consequently, any affiliation with particular groups of people, or people with particular political motives was an anathema.¹¹⁸ Thus, feminists within the university had to prove that they were academically rigorous so that students and other staff members would treat them seriously (Bulbeck 1994, p 120). Moreover, there was a backlash by conservatives in the university. The 'myth of objectivity' generated a suspicion and distrust of Women's Studies as a legitimate knowledge. As a result a number of feminist scholars issued invectives against the university. For example, Louise Johnson claims that the university acted as "an institutional arm of the State concerned with reproducing the existing social order primarily through production and circulation of legitimate knowledge" (Johnson 1987, p 529-530).

¹¹⁶ According to Kerri Watson, "[f]rom the outset, Women's Studies in the university represents an anomaly in the system – an alternative to the highly specialised and discipline-oriented world of academe. A larrikin in the field of learning." (Watson 1987, p 125).

¹¹⁷ While the academy saw Women's Studies as having a political goal, feminists from within the movement debated about whether academics "could be truly political" (Bulbeck 2001, p 24).

¹¹⁸ As discussed elsewhere in this chapter, Marxism also challenged the university ethos, but was taken up in philosophy, politics and sociology departments.

Feminism, like other marginalised knowledges (for example, Marxism), was, and continues to be, invested in disrupting the status quo. Indeed, if the challenges to the status quo these 'subjects' (people and courses) offer are successful they will inevitably change the existing social order. Feminists, like Johnson, saw the need for academic feminists to open up opportunities for women within the academy, not only within arts and education, but within what she calls "higher status fields" like computer science (Johnson 1987, p 529). Feminists actively sought to disrupt the academy's 'Ivory Tower' image by destabilizing its institutional structures and by challenging the universities' privileging of certain knowledges over others. Johnson states:

I would also argue for academic feminists to actively destroy the monopoly the academy has on 'higher' learning. By participating in campaign groups, reading, film, or discussion groups, by involvement in editing and publishing, radio, or television, so called academic knowledge can be spread well beyond the institution at the same time as other women are involved with its reformulation (Johnson 1987, p 530).

A recurring theme for academic feminists is the battle with administrative structures. This point is evident in Susan Magarey's experiences when setting up the Research Centre for Women's Studies at the University of Adelaide in 1984. Almost two years later she claimed that "she never wanted to become an administrator of anything" but this aspect of university life could not be ignored if feminists wanted to be part of the system (Magarey 1986, p 195). Feminists had to negotiate university administration, which included: establishing legitimacy amongst colleagues; arguing through administrative structures for the right to offer Women's Studies courses; designing courses with compelling arguments for alternative educational aims/objectives and learning outcomes; submitting courses for accreditation and determining assessment; applying for grants and faculty funding; and building a research profile through publications in accredited journals. For Johnson, a major difficulty with being an academic in an institution is dealing with "structures of organisation and power" (Johnson 1987, p 531). Insurmountable problems exist between feminist principles and academic structures:

Trying to operate in a supportive, co-operative way when survival and advancement dictates competition and ambition; building confidence in ourselves and our project amid constant harassment of feminism and women's studies; allocating equal work loads and responsibilities when there are formal hierarchies of power, security, status and income; democratising the creation of knowledge when our position is that of expert; producing written material well in advance of student presence and then to formally assess students: all seem insuperable (Johnson 1987, p 531).

What follows are some selected historical moments in the setting up of Women's Studies in the university that reflect Johnson's comments.¹¹⁹ There are several criteria that are pertinent to the establishment of Women's Studies courses at the universities discussed below. These include: the political and academic influences of key feminists who initiated programs, plus their input into decision making processes; institutional support and resistance, especially from senior staff; and community support and resistance. Moreover, these examples highlight the disruptive effect of Women's Studies in specific situations and demonstrate the institutional opposition to Women's Studies as a legitimate field of knowledge. These examples also show the fear that some male academics had of being 'left out' and most importantly of not being the arbiters of knowledge.

Flinders University

The first subject "actually named Women's Studies" was offered at Flinders University in South Australia in 1973.¹²⁰ The semester-long subject offered within the department of Philosophy was strongly opposed by some senior academics. Their concern stemmed from a fear that feminism, like Marxism, would open the door to more subversive politics in the philosophy department. In a few important instances, marginalised knowledges, like feminism, entered the university through philosophy departments (Sydney University, Flinders University) because of philosophy's critique of knowledge; feminism, like Marxism, was another tool to read with. At Flinders University, after initial approval from the Philosophy Consultative Committee a number of women formed a committee, with Rita Helling as convenor, to present a submission to the School of Humanities Board Meeting (Ryan 1975b, p 39). According to Penny Ryan:

¹¹⁹ For a more chronological account see, for example, Magarey et al. (1994). In brief, such accounts relate that the first course taught in women's studies emerged from philosophy at Flinders University in 1973, the second was Kay Daniels' honours course taught in History, University of Tasmania, 1973; third was Margaret Power's interdisciplinary unit offered at the University of Sydney in 1974; and fourth was the Women's Studies program taught at ANU in 1976 (Jones 1998, p 123). This description is disputed (see, for example, Thornton 1999) and does not take into account courses taught within the CAE sector.

¹²⁰ This is generally accepted as the first Women's Studies course or subject to be offered in Australia. However, see Thornton (1999, p 33) who argues she was also teaching a Women's Studies course at the University of Queensland in 1973. The contestation is not only about 'facts' but also demonstrates feminism's implications in a myth of origins (or desire to be first).

At the Board meeting the committee members were subjected to slighting remarks, were described as a “handsome array of ladies”, etc. The Professor of Spanish presented what was meant to be a parody of the course – *The Philosophical, Social, Sexual and Artistic Transcendancy of Tauromachy* (bullfighting) – to the Board for its approval. Many of the Board member thought this was a great joke (Ryan 1975b, p 39).

The Board was aware of the support for the course within the Philosophy Department and the larger community and did not want to reject it outright; instead, they recommended a number of changes. As a result of the meeting the course outline was revised and “Brian Medlin, Professor of Philosophy, was co-opted to the Committee as nominal co-convenor” (Ryan 1975b, p 40). These changes were sufficient to secure course approval (Sheridan 1998).

In 1973, Jean Curthoys began teaching Women’s Studies at Flinders University, under the auspices of the Philosophy Department, headed by Rodney Allen (Professor of Philosophy). Curthoys’ position was the first academic appointment in Women’s Studies at an Australian university (Ryan 1998, p 367). Over sixty people were present at a preliminary meeting, and by 1975, 140 people were enrolled in the course (Ryan 1975b, p 39-40). In 1975, after Curthoys went to Sydney, a full time Women’s Studies lecturer was appointed. Half of the students enrolled in the Women’s Studies course were enrolled in philosophy, but the other half came from the community (community women activists like Betty Fisher were early students).¹²¹ According to Yvonne Allen:

In setting up the Women’s Studies Course at Flinders University last year we felt it was essential that while studying the conditions of women in past and present society we should involve women outside the university environment. We also believe that the course should be self-managing, that is, controlled by the participants themselves (Allen 1975, p 9).

The initial course introduced and maintained a democratic egalitarian community oriented, non-graded structure for a number of years. However, institutional ideologies and student demands gradually eroded these principles.¹²² Since those early days Women’s Studies at Flinders University has developed into a department with an honours year and a PhD program. In 2006 Women’s Studies at Flinders

¹²¹ In 1995, Betty Fisher described her significant involvement in WEL and the Women’s Information Switchboard in South Australia (Fisher 1995). She was also an early graduate of Flinders University’s Women’s Studies programme.

¹²²The diverse and changing culture of Women’s Studies programs is taken up later in this chapter.

University celebrated 20 years as a “free-standing department in the Faculty of Social Sciences” (Sheridan and Dally 2006, p vii).¹²³

Some of the issues that plagued Women’s Studies at Flinders University were also apparent at Sydney University. Both universities had to argue to establish Women’s Studies as a legitimate course, both were conducted within Philosophy departments, and both struggled with the connections made by male academics between Women’s Studies and Marxism. The main difference was that at Sydney University the struggle to establish a Women’s Studies course led to a strike that precipitated the splitting of the Philosophy department into two departments.

Sydney University

In 1973 a semester length subject called “Women and Philosophy” was introduced at the University of Sydney. This came about after a strike by students and staff over the rights of students to determine the content of their courses (Magarey and Sheridan 2002, p 130). As this would later turn out to be a significant moment in feminist history, some background to the (June) 1973 strike is presented. Moreover, the strike is particularly pertinent to this chapter as the work developed by feminists based in Sydney in the 1980s was the type of academic feminism that is the focus of this thesis (Johnson 1998, p 207).

In the 1960s Robert Menzies, then Prime Minister of Australia, increased the number of Australian universities from seven to seventeen. A decision that he came to later regret:

it should have been obvious that there weren’t enough good academics in Australia to run seven, let alone seventeen – and this was at the period of course of all the Vietnam troubles (Menzies, quoted in Franklin 1999, p 1).

The Vietnam War, which saw conscription re-introduced in Australia, led to activism within the universities during the 1960s and early 1970s. Moreover, there was an increasing interest in and involvement with left-wing politics and philosophical

¹²³ In 1987 Lyndall Ryan, based at the School of Social Sciences at Flinders University, proposed the establishment of an Australian Women’s Studies Association (AWSA). There was strong support from Women’s Studies scholars and academics, thus the Inaugural Australian Women’s Studies Association Conference was held in July 1989 (Bulbeck 2006, p 1)

thought, which would soon include Women's Studies.¹²⁴ Sydney University, as one of Australia's oldest sandstone institutions, resisted what it saw as "the coming wave of leftist politicisation" (Franklin 1999, p 1). However, radical students and staff looked to philosophy (and other disciplines in the social sciences) for ways and places within the university where understanding issues of disadvantage, especially in the climate of the Vietnam War could be developed.

As a precursor to the 1973 strike, in 1971, two academics (Wal Suchting and Michael Devitt) in the Department of Philosophy put forward a number of courses on Marxist-Leninism. A key figure in the philosophy dispute, David Stove, along with the head of the department, David Armstrong, vetoed the proposal for these courses, even though they were passed at a departmental meeting (Franklin 1999, p 2).¹²⁵ According to Franklin, by 1973 "the issues of Marxism, democratisation of departments and 'academic freedom' were thus rolled into one, and the fight was on", not only in Sydney but throughout the country (Franklin 1999, p 2).

Feminism, like Marxism, was another 'new' knowledge that the philosophy department resisted. Feminists, as students, were now present in large enough numbers to demand a course that addressed their issues. As there had been no feminist courses within the university, there were no feminist tenured academics at Sydney University.¹²⁶ Therefore, two graduate students (Jean Curthoys, who was instrumental at Flinders University, and Liz Jacka) put forward a course titled "Philosophical Aspects of Feminist Thought" (Neale 1973, p 28).¹²⁷ According to Miriam Dixson, "after lengthy discussions with the Department and the Arts Faculty,

¹²⁴ The 1960s and 1970s in Australia was a time of growing political awareness; groups like the New Left, the Anti-Vietnam War Movement, and Anti-Apartheid Movement mobilised students. See Wills (1983, p 312-314) for more details.

¹²⁵ Both academics were associated with *Quadrant* and held right-wing sympathies.

¹²⁶ While women students were increasing in numbers in the 1970s (29.5 per cent undergraduate enrolment and 24.5 per cent postgraduate enrolment) few women were employed as academics (Over 1981, p 166). According to Over in 1978, "16 per cent of academic appointments were held by women" in Australian Universities (Over 1981, p 166). Moreover, at Sydney University only 10.5 per cent of women were employed at lecturer and above (Over 1981, p 168). Of the 16 per cent of women employed as academics, most were employed in lower status positions or positions lacking tenure. For more information see Over (Over 1981; Over and Lancaster 1984).

¹²⁷ Although, according to Franklin, the course that led to the strike was titled "The politics of sexual oppression" (Franklin 1999, p 3), while Anna Coombs claims it was called "Philosophical Issues in Feminist Thought" (Coombs 1996, p 278).

the course was approved, only to be subsequently vetoed by the Professorial Board” (Dixson 1975, p 32). Among those who were strongly opposed to the course were four senior academics, including David Stove and David Armstrong. Their objections to the course were stated in such a way as to avoid being labelled sexist. Mostly male academics voiced their concerns on three accounts: that the course would be ‘unbalanced’ as it focused on women’s issues; that it had a strong ‘marxist emphasis’; and that it was to be taught by graduate students (Walker and Smith 1979, p 375). In addition, Jean Curthoys claims that “most of the arguments were directed either against the political or biased nature of the course, or questioned whether it was really Philosophy” (Curthoys 1975, p 6). According to Franklin, even after the Faculty of Arts approved the course:

The professional Board rejected the proposed course, and a strike of staff and students began, spreading to several arts and social science departments and disrupting lectures in them for weeks. Students attending the lectures of Armstrong and other non-striking philosophers faced pickets outside and inside the lectures. Tents were pitched on the quadrangle lawn. Jack Munday¹²⁸ appeared on campus, promising a Builders Labourers Federation ban on work at the university (Franklin 1999, p 3).¹²⁹

Charges of sexism were levelled at the University’s bureaucracy. Marxists, most of whom were men, joined forces with feminists to fight for the course until the course was finally approved. This was seen to be a victory for both Marxists and feminists. However, some feminists had reservations about the way the left-wing men dominated discussions (Neale 1973). While the course was approved, Neale claims that dominant left-wing men and their agendas subsumed the feminist agenda. Where the feminist activists had focused on the university’s sexist agenda, this issue was displaced for the left-wing men’s focus on self-management and autonomy, and feminism was deemed “a minor issue” by comparison (Neale 1973, p 28).¹³⁰ Neale sadly acknowledges that:

¹²⁸ Jack Munday was the secretary of the Builders’ Labourers Federation.

¹²⁹ Student action, possibly less dramatic than the Sydney University strike, was not restricted to Sydney. In her account of the first Women’s Studies program at the Australian National University (ANU) in 1975, Magarey states that:

In 1974, what was later euphemistically termed a ‘student education campaign’ – during which students occupied the offices and committee rooms of the university’s administration building continuously for several days and nights – called for action on four demands. The fourth was the establishment of a Women’s Studies course (Magarey 1986, p 196).

¹³⁰ Indeed, Neale states that women were told that it would be “‘tactically disadvantageous’ to bring in sexism” (Neale 1973, p 28).

we needed male support to the extent that without it, it is unlikely that the struggle would have gotten off the ground. The reason for this is that we had so little support from women on the campus ... Women on campus remained unmoved by appeals to them to realise that *their* interests were at stake, and women speaking about sexism were passively received. There seems no simple explanation for this. Certainly women on campus are generally unresponsive to Women's Liberation: they don't see themselves as being oppressed: by getting to University many of them no doubt feel that they've 'made it' in a man's world ... Had we had much more support from women students, no doubt things would have turned out very differently; we would then have had the strength and solidarity to do without the male left (Neale 1973, p 28, author's emphasis).

The decision by the university hierarchy to proceed with the feminist course strengthened the split in the philosophy department. The Vice Chancellor decided to split the department into two to stop any further disputes, and/or resignations. The head of the department, Armstrong, formed the "Department of Traditional and Modern Philosophy", while the Marxist and feminist factions united under the banner of "General Philosophy" (Franklin 1999, p 4). The department of General Philosophy attracted three times more students than its rival; however, it was plagued by internal disputes. For Neale, several lessons were learnt in this battle, among the most important is "that we can't involve men in our struggles and expect them to sit back and do the shitwork"; "we can't allow ourselves to get drawn in to male dominated power politics"; and "struggle is through solidarity" (Neale 1973, p 29).

While there are mixed accounts of the details of the philosophy strike at Sydney University there is international (feminist) recognition of its significance and its similarity to the struggles in Women's Studies in other parts of the world. Val Plumwood suggests that the 'culture wars' of the United States are akin to the Sydney dispute:

Australian intellectual life has its own record of such polarised engagements from the Cold War period, especially in philosophy, most notably in the conflicts around feminist philosophy at Sydney University in the 1970s that produced the famous split of its philosophy department into two departments (Plumwood 1999, p 144-145).

Deakin University

Robyn Rowland claims that she was appointed at Deakin University in 1980 with the remit to establish a Women's Studies course (Rowland 1982, p 487). By 1982 the course was still not established and Rowland suggests several reasons for the delay:

Essentially, women's studies courses are difficult to establish because of the prejudice in our higher education institutions which are usually hierarchical, autocratic, and male-dominated. No matter how softly you peddle your wares, women's studies will be viewed by many academics as threatening, non-academic and radical (Rowland 1982, p 489).

Rowland claims that there are "four basic moves" or opposition/attacks that feminists should be aware of when putting forward a Women's Studies course, three of which were relevant to Deakin: "what about men's studies courses?", based around the argument that women's issues cannot be dealt with in isolation; the accusation that the course would be biased, that it is a "course of advocacy"; a "concern for the aftermath" or the issue that the course might upset women and that the university will feel responsible; and the opposition of conservative academic women in high status positions who "deliberately lined up against women's studies" (Rowland 1982, p 491). Even where these accusations might be countered, like including "a special 2 week module on men" they made little difference to the overall outcome. While Rowland did not give up the fight she states that:

After 6 years in the field, including 3 of relative ease at Waikato [New Zealand], I am rediscovering my anger at Deakin. After 8 months of being continually questioned, continually harassed, accused of being unprofessional and unscholarly, continually slighted as an academic in a university that flashed the façade of its liberal face to the world, I am angry (Rowland 1982, p 494).

The Deakin program finally won approval. It was modelled on Britain's Open University and offered external courses put together by a team of leading feminist academics. Sneja Gunew chaired a team of women who prepared a feminist course and reader. This material was later published in two volumes, a textbook and a reader, under the titles of *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct* (Gunew 1990b) and *A Reader in Feminist Knowledge* (Gunew 1991). Gunew writes of that experience:

we tacitly assumed we could work as a feminist collective while at the same time being locked into university hierarchies. It was irresponsible to assert that we were all equal: there were differences in workloads, in salaries, and so on. ... Without really discussing our priorities we were all expected to have the same ones (Gunew 1987b, p 535-536).

These feminists found that, as they worked together in the production of the course, they became increasingly distanced from each other, largely because of divergent theoretical commitments. The diverse content matter of *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct* reflects the theoretical divisions between the feminists.

Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct saturated feminist theory courses across the country. Indeed, it was used as the core text in many honours courses, including that at Flinders University (Sheridan and Dally 2006, p 33). The text is divided into four sections: Feminist Knowledge, Contemporary Theories of Power and Subjectivity; Discourses of Definition; and Feminist Interventions.¹³¹ In particular, several chapters by Elizabeth Grosz, from the General Philosophy Department at Sydney University, provided an introduction to deconstruction as critique (Grosz 1990d, p 147-174; 1990a, p 332-344); and two other chapters provoked debates about critical concepts in Women's Studies, such as 'the subject' (Grosz 1990b, p 59-120 ; Rothfield 1990, 121-144).

Griffith University

Chilla Bulbeck's account of the introduction of a set of courses in Women's Studies at Griffith University in Queensland also reveals resistance by male academics, and interestingly non-feminist women outside and within the academy (Bulbeck 1987). The proposed Women's Studies courses were initially opposed by Professor Caton of the School of Humanities who, in response, put up his own proposal for 'a School of Behavioural Sciences', which he maintained would cover the issues raised in the feminist course by putting forward 'facts', and not 'rhetoric and polemic' (Bulbeck 1987, p 538). Caton's proposal was not successful and, according to Bulbeck, he "appeared to withdraw his opposition" to the courses (Bulbeck 1987, p 538). Many months later, but before an outline of the new courses was available, letters to the editor attacking feminist and Marxist teaching at Griffith appeared in the *Courier-Mail*. Moreover, a national right-wing group of conservative women who called themselves "Women Who Want to be Women" circulated a petition against the course. This national group was part of a growing backlash against feminism in Australia. Caton formed an alliance with this group and moved the protest into the political arena with the aid of the conservative National Party (Bulbeck 1987, p 539). Similar to the Sydney University strike, Griffith University found that it was involved in a bigger battle, that is, "the need for university autonomy, and the resistance to outside, political interference" (Bulbeck 1987, p 539), in the case of

¹³¹ A detailed discussion of the contents of this text is provided in Chapter 5.

Griffith, a battle, which according to Bulbeck was lost. The university bowed to Caton's political pressure, by an "unprecedented move" that allowed him to comment at different stages of the process (Bulbeck 1987, p 540). Caton's interference throughout the approval process led to political decisions being made, including title changes, as well as questioning "the academic autonomy of the female academics who had developed these courses" (Bulbeck 1987, p 540).

Adelaide University

The Women's Studies program at Adelaide University presents an interesting counterpoint to the above programs.¹³²

As Kay Schaffer recalls, the Women's Studies program began as a Graduate Diploma in Teaching, one of five strands in an umbrella program introduced in 1978 at what was then Salisbury CAE.¹³³ Ironically, decision-making committees within the CAE largely supported Women's Studies, perhaps, suggests Schaffer, the first program coordinator, because it was expected to fail to attract students. Thus, the staff involved in the development of the other four strands gave lip service to Women's Studies, and in response received the support of the feminist lecturers for their programs. In fact, Women's Studies was the only strand of the five proposed strands to attract students; it drew large numbers of professional women from diverse fields like nursing, education, law, librarianship, and the public service sectors. Women's Studies became a Graduate Diploma in its own right (GDipWS) in 1981. It grew to encompass six dedicated full time lecturers who moved the program to the city campus of SACAE after the CAEs amalgamated in 1982 and formed a department of Women's Studies with undergraduate and graduate programs.¹³⁴ This unit then became the Department of Women's Studies at Adelaide University after the mergers of 1990-91, offering undergraduate, Honours, Masters and PhD programs.

¹³² As there are no published accounts of the introduction of Women's Studies at Adelaide University I am largely relying on interview material from Kay Schaffer and email comments from Myra Betschild.

¹³³ Kay Schaffer, personal communication, 22 August 2006.

¹³⁴ Myra Betschild, personal communication, 31 August 2006.

The transition of Women's Studies from a strand in a teaching degree to a diploma in its own right is an interesting story that bears many similarities to the stories above.

As required by accreditation processes, the Graduate Diploma was developed with the aid of extensive community consultations and approved by diverse professional bodies. The initiative had strong support from the Humanities Division head, Andrew Chalmers, who helped to usher it through administrative hurdles within the institution. Notwithstanding, and despite widespread support from the community and professions, when the course reached the final stage before accreditation, the senior administration balked. The Deputy Principal, Dale C. Paul, called a meeting of the team and demanded that it include a male lecturer from psychology (to avoid the charge that it was biased because the teaching team only included women). Paul wanted to include a course in sex role psychology as a *core* unit (for 'balance') and give the psychology lecturer veto power over team decisions. It was admitted that this particular lecturer had no expertise in the area of gender relations.¹³⁵ The feminist lecturers present were shocked at this late development in the accreditation process.¹³⁶ Only after Schaffer threatened to resign from the team did Paul relent. The course passed through all relevant committees and registered about twelve students in its first year. In the subsequent years the course grew to about 90 equivalent full time students each year and graduated hundreds of professional women who added feminist expertise to their prior degrees in nursing, education, the arts, science, and so on.¹³⁷ It became one of the largest postgraduate courses at Salisbury CAE.

Women's Studies was resisted by the mostly male and mostly conservative staff at Salisbury CAE (about one in ten of the academics were female). Women academics and general staff, regularly referred to as 'girls', were sidelined from decision making.¹³⁸ One of the ways in which some of the male academics thought to show

¹³⁵ In fact, the psychology courses still included several weeks of core lectures on Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation. Kay Schaffer reports that she was asked to give a feminist response to the lectures on maternal deprivation, which she did after weeks of reading and study. The following week the lecturer (without Schaffer present) told the class to discount her lecture since, as a *working mother*, she was obviously biased against Bowlby (Kay Schaffer, pers. comm., 22 August 2006).

¹³⁶ Kay Schaffer, personal communication, 22 August 2006.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

their disdain of Women's Studies was to place a jock strap in Kay Schaffer's pigeon hole with a note that read 'To support you in your endeavours'. Schaffer pinned the jock strap on the staff bulletin board with a note saying something like 'thanks but we don't need this kind of support'.¹³⁹ At SACAE the course received support from the Dean and Head of School but not from senior administration.¹⁴⁰ Denise Bradley (Deputy Principal SACAE), intent on supporting Indigenous programs, saw Women's Studies as a (less deserving) rival for the limited resources and federal support of the special grant schemes.

When Women's Studies moved to Adelaide University, it was amalgamated with the preexisting Research Centre for Women's Studies, but was forced to share the space, budget and resources of the Research Centre.¹⁴¹ According to Schaffer, Women's Studies was expected to fail, or fade away.¹⁴² Circumstances only changed following a faculty review, chaired by Professor Penny Boumelha, that showed the department outperformed eight of the eleven departments in research grants, publications, and PhD supervisions.¹⁴³ This success resulted, after protracted negotiations, in a chair of Women's Studies, the position taken up by Chilla Bulbeck in January 1998. The course had community and professional support: it was designed as a student centred, course, initially using a non-graded pass structure.¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

While this chapter focuses on Women's Studies in the university sector, a brief look at the Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) is important. The CAEs contributed to the development of deconstruction and, perhaps more importantly, to the initial development of Cultural Studies. Cultural Studies is significant in the story of deconstruction and feminism as this is where much feminist work in deconstruction is currently situated. The progressive nature of some of the courses at the CAEs

¹³⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ After the 1982 merger of the CAEs, Salisbury expanded the team to include Women's Studies lecturers and courses from other campuses – particularly Magill (formerly Hartley) where there was a strong team and an undergraduate Women's Studies course.

¹⁴¹ The Research Centre for Women's Studies was established in 1984 and closed in 2001. It ran independently of the Women's Studies department, although staff attended seminars run by the Research Centre and Susan Magarey, the director, did some teaching in Women's Studies.

¹⁴² Kay Schaffer, personal communication, 22 August 2006.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*

might also suggest one of the reasons why at least some academics at Salisbury CAE might have been open to Women's Studies.

Unlike the university sector, by the mid 1970s, Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) offered more than a single subject or unit in Women's Studies. In 1978 Salisbury CAE (South Australia) introduced a Graduate Diploma, which included units in Theory (Feminist Theories and Cultural Studies),¹⁴⁵ Practice (Vocational and Disciplinary studies) and Personal Development (Consciousness Raising, Self Defence and Women's Health).¹⁴⁶ In the same year, Rusden CAE (Victoria) also introduced a Graduate Diploma in Women's Studies, which was vocational in orientation. According to Lyndall Ryan, "Women's Studies courses at CAEs were freer to experiment and less constricted by the need to conform to conventional academic standards" (Ryan 1998, p 367). Semiotic theory and Continental philosophy were introduced as a part of Media studies/Communication studies as well as in Women's Studies courses. Having said that, the CAE system was vocational/praxis oriented and, unlike the universities, courses were rigorously monitored and accredited by the Australian Commission on Advanced Awards.

Semiotic theory was taught in the CAE sector before it was introduced in the university sector and grew to encompass Cultural Studies and Media Studies. Steven Muecke, Bob Hodge, Gunther Kress, Susan Sheridan, Bronwen Levy, and Noel King were teaching a number of courses in the Communications Degree at Magill (South Australia) in the early 1980s, including 'Television Analysis' co-ordinated by Noel King, and 'Structures and Meanings of Language' co-ordinated by Steven Muecke.¹⁴⁷ The connection between CAEs and progressive theory was apparent in

¹⁴⁵ For instance, in 1981 Kay Schaffer offered a course titled 'Women and Culture' which included work by Derrida, Foucault, Lacan and French feminist theory.

¹⁴⁶ Kay Schaffer, personal communication, 15 February 2002.

¹⁴⁷ In addition, as early as 1983 and 1984 a variety of courses were taught in the Communications Degree at Magill CAE that made reference to French feminism, especially the work of Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray. Susan Sheridan taught '20th Century Women Writers' and 'Images of Women' citing Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray in the reading list. 'Interpretation of Culture' was team taught: readings included Michèle Barrett, Barbara Creed, Angela McRobbie, and Marks and de Courtivron's *New French Feminisms*. Derrida, as such, was not prominent on reading lists, although deconstruction might have been mentioned through the work of Irigaray. On the other hand, Foucault's *History of Sexuality* was ubiquitous (Roslyn Prosser, personal communication, 15 August 2006).

1980 when the first Australian Cultural Studies conference was held at Magill CAE (Lewis 2003, p 197).¹⁴⁸ According to K K Ruthven:

Critical theory was more likely to be encountered in media studies and courses on popular culture developed and taught in some of the CAEs and newer universities than in the high-culture oriented older universities (Ruthven 1993, p 154).

In 1990, the Dawkins reforms¹⁴⁹ put an end to the binary system that had relegated CAEs to secondary status as vocational institutions. The restructuring of the tertiary sector caused much confusion, but also increased opportunities for many academics who were in the college system, by giving them the status and credibility required to access research funds. As Ann Curthoys described the situation:

Although there have always been college academics who did research, under the binary system of the 1970s and 1980s the colleges had teaching loads and an organizational culture that frequently inhibited research, and rarely encouraged it. There was no research funding (Curthoys 1991, p 387).

After 1991, it became possible for more feminists and cultural theorists from the CAE sector to be involved in theory and research.

The above accounts demonstrated at least some resistance to the introduction of Women's Studies courses. Resistance was mostly from male academic staff. The opposition towards Marxism and feminism in the universities can be understood as a hostility towards politics and bias, as opposed to the presumed objectivity of pure knowledge. For instance, in the case of Flinders University, the resistance from senior academics was due to a fear of introducing a subversive 'biased' knowledge into the university. This rationale was echoed in the Sydney University example, whereby theoretical affiliation with Marxist theory was considered a threat by some male academics in the philosophy department. The teaching of Women's Studies at Salisbury CAE, while it countered opposition also had some support, which could be attributed to the CAE sectors less rigid disciplinary boundaries.

Unlike the courses at the other universities the Deakin course produced a textbook written by leading feminists (not all at Deakin, for example Elizabeth Grosz) which had a pervasive impact across Australia. However, Deakin University became

¹⁴⁸ While CAEs were teaching both semiotics and feminism, this conference did not have very much, if any, feminist input.

¹⁴⁹ So called after John Dawkins the federal Labor Minister for Education who oversaw the merger of universities and CAEs.

particularly troubled by the theoretical diversity among its Women's Studies staff, which is an issue taken up the next chapter.

Postscript

Not all activism on the part of Women's Studies occurred in the university sector or the CAE sector. In the introduction to *Australian Cultural Studies*, Frow and Morris claim that the critical intellectual milieu that gave rise to cultural studies was mostly located outside the university system (Frow and Morris 1993, p xxvi). They invoke a 'bohemian' intellectual life located in WEA (Workers' Education Association) courses¹⁵⁰ and "a socially mixed but intensely familiar urban subculture [in conjunction with] small journal networks ... both of which were historically deep-rooted in the inner-city life of Sydney and Melbourne" (Frow and Morris 1993, p xxvi).¹⁵¹ The Sydney University strike brought feminism and critical thinking into the university sector in Sydney. For young feminists, like Morris and Grosz, this was a particularly fertile period for publishing and the development of their intellectual life.¹⁵² Journals and magazines became useful tools by which 'second wave' feminists communicated and shared ideas. Whilst papers and newsletters were in circulation before 1970, the first feminist journal, *Mejane*, was started up by Ann Curthoys, this was followed by the publication of *Refractory Girl* in 1973¹⁵³ and *Hecate* in 1975. Journals and magazines were used for "political discussion, influence, and social intervention" (Ferrier 1998, p 441). Other feminist material available in the 1970s include journals like *Womanspeak*, *Lip*, and *Bluestocking*, the newspaper *Mabel*, and a weekly ABC radio programme called *Coming Out Ready or Not* (Walker and Smith 1979, p 382).

¹⁵⁰ WEA courses provided introductions to film/media studies, but did not offer courses in feminist theory.

¹⁵¹ In particular, Frow and Morris credit John Flaus (actor and film critic) as a big influence. Flaus taught Film Theory at the WEA in Newport Beach, Sydney (Frow and Morris 1993, p xxv).

¹⁵² Some of the feminists who were involved in the Sydney University dispute have impacted considerably on the direction taken by Australian feminism and Australian Cultural Studies, for example Elizabeth Grosz, Meaghan Morris and Moira Gatens. The split in the philosophy department is described by Felski and Sofia as a key moment in the development of a radical brand of feminist thought, which questioned the body and subjectivity through a French poststructuralist lens (Felski and Sofia 1996, p 386).

¹⁵³ A collective based in Sydney managed *Refractory Girl*.

The aim of the next section is to briefly look at some of the destabilizing effects of feminism on the academy, but not to provide a comprehensive account of all feminist work.

Women's Studies in the University Sector 1970s–1990s: An Overview

As a way of following the direction that feminist theory has taken, it is useful to outline the way in which Women's Studies as a discipline was established in Australian universities. This section is more of a genealogy, albeit a partial one, than a history. In order to provide a sense of the impact that Women's Studies had in the university sector, two aspects are considered: first, how Women's Studies organised itself within the University; and second, an outline of some of the responses to Women's Studies by feminists and other academics.

While feminists have recorded some of their experiences in setting up Women's Studies courses, there is very little analysis of the type of feminism being promoted.¹⁵⁴ Lyndall Ryan (1998) identifies four models of feminism or Women's Studies in the academy. While it is useful to look at the four models as defined by Ryan, it is also necessary to point out that Ryan applies a structuralist methodology with its inherent strengths and limitations. Most importantly, it is necessary to remember that these approaches are complex and overlapping.

The first model identified by Ryan operates on the assumption that women enrol in Women's Studies because of a personal interest born out of the Women's Movement. Thus, the intention is that these courses will not become part of the university curriculum but rather that they will maintain a connection to the Women's Movement. This model encouraged open access policies and open assessment strategies (Ryan 1998, p 368). This model was at its peak in the early days of

¹⁵⁴ Klein identifies three 'types' of Women's Studies scholarship, 're-action, re-vision'; 'action, vision'; and a combination of both (Klein 1991, p 127-128). Briefly, by 're-action, re-vision', Klein is referring to "the absence and distortion of women from the non-feminist structure of knowledge" and feminist critiques of the disciplines (Klein 1991, p 127). An 'action, vision' feminist scholarship "creates its own women-centred definition of 'cross-', 'trans', or multidisciplinary" knowledge (Klein 1991, p 127). This type of scholarship is more than reformist, "what happens is a paradigmatic shift, creating new theories and methodologies for teaching and research" (Klein 1991, p 128). The combination of both of these types enables a "critiquing [of] androcentric scholarship as well as making an 'imaginative leap' towards the creation of knowledge (vision, action)" (Klein 1991, p 128).

Women's Studies in the university sector, and was employed in the CAEs. Flinders University used this approach from the outset, as did Salisbury CAE, but changes in the accreditation process meant that the model was modified in the 1980s.

The second model "drew much more closely on existing disciplines", such as history, politics and philosophy (Ryan 1998, p 368). This model operates within the traditional university culture in regard to assessment and teaching practices. The goal for feminists was to critique existing disciplines by looking for absences and offering suggestions to address them. Renate Klein refers to this model as the reformist or liberal feminist project, where the goal is to "add women to the curriculum" (Klein 1991, p 127).

The third model "involved the design and establishment of new interdisciplinary courses" (Ryan 1998, p 368). This model was important, as feminist theory/knowledges became central and not discipline based. The first course of this kind was titled 'The Political Economy of Women' and was taught at Sydney University in 1974. This course was taught by a number of feminists across several departments. According to Ryan:

This model became the basis of a number of new courses in women's studies, using new methodological approaches. It offered a critique of structures and methodologies and opened the way for a feminist field of knowledge (Ryan 1998, p 368).

In many institutions the third model was incorporated with the second model so that it was possible for students to major in Women's Studies. The second and third models are the "most popular form of a women's studies program in Australian universities" (Ryan 1998, p 368).

The fourth model "involved setting up an independently located program of integrated trans-disciplinary units, with an honours year" (Ryan 1998, p 368). This model was first practised at the Australian National University in 1976, and was subsequently developed at Deakin, Flinders, Griffith, Murdoch and Adelaide Universities (Ryan 1998, p 368). The main difference between the third and fourth models is organisational rather than theoretical.

Variations on all but the first model are currently in practice in universities across Australia. These models evolved as Women's Studies engaged with institutional structures, thus they are about course structure and the theoretical directions within academic feminism. As long as feminists have worked within the academy they have engaged with the institution on many levels, including research, teaching and administration. Within these areas they are contributing to existing knowledge (content), developing new theories and/or methodologies, and challenging institutional (workplace) norms. For the sake of clarity, each type of work will be briefly commented on. It is important to note, however, that these classifications, like the ones above, are arbitrary, but useful to this genealogy. There is a vast amount of feminist work being done in the academy, which could be sorted in many other ways by using different criteria.

Since 1973 Women's Studies has flourished in the university sector. By 1986 five universities in Australia taught Women's Studies as a major, six offered postgraduate programs (ie. Masters), and all universities offered at least one semester long subject (Bulbeck 1991, p 27). In 1989 Jacqui Woodland conducted a review of Women's Studies courses taught in Australian universities (Woodland 1990).¹⁵⁵ Her study outlined the types of programs and the levels offered in Women's Studies at each university in 1989 (that is, major, honours, MA [by coursework], MA [by research], and PhD). From her study, it is possible to get a sense of the impact and availability of Women's Studies in the universities. Nine of the seventeen universities that existed at the time of the study, before the Dawkins reforms, offered a major (or equivalent) in Women's Studies, plus MA (coursework), MA (research) and PhD level.¹⁵⁶ Four universities offered several courses at undergraduate level, honours, plus an MA or MEd or MLitt in Women's Studies by coursework only.¹⁵⁷ Griffith

¹⁵⁵ Woodland's text predates the 1990 amalgamation of CAEs and Universities.

¹⁵⁶ The nine universities to offer Women's Studies from undergraduate to PhD level were the Australian National University (ANU) (Woodland 1990, p 5); Flinders University (Woodland 1990, p 7); La Trobe University (Woodland 1990, p 13); Macquarie University (Woodland 1990, p 16); Monash (Woodland 1990, p 20-23); and University of Sydney (Woodland 1990, p 26-27). Deakin University, Murdoch University and University of Queensland offered a interuniversity Women's Studies program available in external mode (Woodland 1990, p 40-41).

¹⁵⁷ The four universities to offer Women's Studies from undergraduate to Masters by coursework were Adelaide University (Woodland 1990, p 3-4); University of Melbourne (Woodland 1990, p 18); University of New England (MEd or MLitt in WS) (Woodland 1990, p 24); and University of New South Wales (Woodland 1990, p 27).

University offered a major in Women's Studies at undergraduate level plus honours (Woodland 1990, p 10). The three other universities offered Women's Studies (or Gender Studies at the Universities of New South Wales (UNSW) and the University of Wollongong), in an interdisciplinary mode up to either Masters level, or, in the case of University of Technology, Sydney, a PhD with a focus in Women's Studies (Woodland 1990, p 27, 37-38, 32). Thus, the sixteen years since 1973, when there were three university courses taught in Women's Studies, had seen a literal explosion in Women's Studies courses available at university.¹⁵⁸ In 1993, Women's Studies was taught in most Australian higher education institutions (Magarey et al. 1994, p 294-295), with the biggest growth area in postgraduate research (Threadgold 2000a, p 44).

Having said that, since the late 1990s many Women's Studies courses have been rebadged as Gender Studies. For some, Gender Studies indicates the demise of Women's Studies and for others the successful inroads made by deconstructive thought, a matter that is taken up later in this chapter. The following analysis of Women's Studies' goals is based on Ryan's typology.

Existing Knowledges

Some academic feminists began teaching Women's Studies by modifying or using existing theoretical paradigms to incorporate or take into account women or women's issues in other disciplines (Science, Literature, History, and so on) – to fill in the gap and complete the story. There has been some important work done in the fields of literature and history, where women's contributions have been researched and written from scratch, or recovered from obscurity and brought into public debate and awareness. While some important work has been done in this area, for instance feminist histories are changing the way Australians imagine their past, this project is far from finished. Much of this type of feminist work fits into the liberal equality project requiring an 'add women and stir' approach. However, as Joan Scott showed in her important article 'Experience', this method is insufficient as it does not place

¹⁵⁸ Indeed, it has been sixteen years since Woodland conducted her study. Most universities have expanded their Women's Studies program: for example, the University of Adelaide offers Gender Studies, within the Discipline of Gender, Work and Social Inquiry, at undergraduate, honours and PhD level in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences.

“those alternatives within the framework of (historically contingent) dominant patterns of sexuality and the ideology that supports them” (Scott 1992, p 25). Thus, feminists, many historians among them, who have moved away from this liberal premise look at the way in which both disciplines and “subjects are constituted through experience” rather than the experience of a particular subject (Scott 1992, p 26).

Challenging Institutional (workplace) Norms

Academic feminism also filtered out into the community, especially into the public service, as it became the forum for legal change and advancing women’s rights. By the 1980s, feminist graduates were entering the work force. Feminists were now part of the systems (education, health and so on) which they previously criticised. The phenomenon of the ‘femocrat’ emerged, an Australian epithet that refers to feminist trained professionals at high-level bureaucrat appointments, whose job it is to advance women’s issues (Eisenstein 1990).¹⁵⁹ Among other things, femocrats led the battle with administrative concerns – to introduce Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), health, child care, welfare, legal reform and education. Given the egalitarian Australian ethos and Women’s Studies’ links to left-wing politics, it is not surprising that, as Hester Eisenstein notes in her analysis of 1980s reform politics, “Australian feminists appear to ... operate on the basis of a socialist-feminist praxis linked to the politics of the welfare state” (Eisenstein 1990, p 88). For instance, Rape Crisis Centres and Women’s Refuges were set up in the health sector in response to the direct needs of women. These projects were often joint initiatives between academics and the Women’s Liberation Movement. Many began in International Women’s Year (1975) through a \$3.3 million special initiatives funding provided by the Whitlam Government (Summers 1997, p 8).

¹⁵⁹ Elizabeth Reid was appointed in 1973 as adviser to the then Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, see Yeatman (1990) for details. However, the position was seen “as a tokenistic gesture” and “parts of the Sydney Women’s Liberation reacted to the position with hostility” (Wills 1983, p 318). Reid resigned in 1975 “over the impossibility of the position she was put in” (Wills 1983, p 323). The first femocrat was Sara Dowse. Dowse was head of the ‘Women’s Affairs Sector’, later known as the ‘Office for the Status of Women’ and in 1990 as the ‘Office for Women’ (Ryan 1990, p 83). It is now part of Family and Community Services.

While all feminist work is important, this thesis focuses on a particular kind of feminism: on Australian feminists who drew upon deconstruction to develop radical ways of conceptualising feminine subjectivity, and to develop new theories and/or methodologies. Deconstructive feminists are engaged in a philosophical project designed to rethink the basic premises that underlie humanist Enlightenment, the liberal theoretical approaches. This work is different from feminists who critique Enlightenment approaches by showing up deficiencies, but who then complement existing knowledges with feminist perspectives which follow a liberal reform agenda. Once Women's Studies was established in the academy, from the early 1980s, the cross currents of Cultural Studies, media and French feminist philosophy led to a deconstructive critique (both within the CAE and university curricula). Through the late 1980s deconstruction was visible at conferences, such as the *Futur-Fall Conference*; in texts, such as *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct*; and indicated by the name change to Gender Studies in many institutions. Feminists in the academy identified deficiencies in the philosophical foundations of liberal feminism. Liberal feminists raised questions that philosophy could not contemplate. These issues are identified in Chapter Two, but briefly include: problems with the sameness/difference arguments; an understanding that men and women are not 'equal' but are constituted through the binary opposition masculine/feminine, that is hierarchically ordered; the masculine as the normative measure; and that feminine identity is constructed through difference (from the masculine). Deconstruction works towards new methodologies or theories that offer inclusive, or at the very least, less oppressive ways of representing the self and the other (theories that recognize their limitations and partialities), which were not available prior to deconstruction.

Developing New Theories and/or Methodologies

Feminists worked hard to secure places for women in the academy. However, they discovered that, once within the academy, they struggled with the knowledges and frameworks they inherited, in both a teaching and research capacity (Threadgold 2000a). Some feminists found that the theoretical models and discipline-based structures of science, philosophy and history were themselves invested in and

contributed to women's oppression. Such feminists considered the philosophical theories that informed the disciplines to be phallogocentric, that is, no amount of reform would change the basic premises of existing theories to make women's self-representation possible. This political critique gave weight to and also required deconstructive methodology, theory and application. Vicki Kirby states "the modern era is marked by an investment in the corrosive power of objectivity, truth and rational argument", which excluded the feminine (Kirby 1994, p 121). Therefore, new theories, or philosophical systems of representation had to be developed whose basic premises did not exclude or devalue the feminine. Feminists looked to new knowledges, also previously excluded from the university sector, to challenge (de) and (re)construct concepts. For instance, an increased number of Australian feminist academics, like Elizabeth Grosz, Moira Gatens, Terry Threadgold, Sneja Gunew, Rosalyn Diprose, Vicki Kirby, Cate Poynton, and Kay Schaffer, influenced by the work of Freud, Lacan, neo-Lacanian psychoanalysis, and the French feminists (Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous), developed university courses which focused "more on textual and cultural phenomena, and included work on the media, on gender and technology, on the visual arts" rather than on empirical work (based on sociology) (Poynton 1995, p 14). According to Terry Threadgold:

The focus of academic feminist work became the academic knowledges and organisational structures which proved so intractable to feminist interventions. It was this that came to be seen as one of the key sites for social struggle and social and political change (Threadgold 2000a, p 40).

The many theoretical and practical directions taken by feminists implied in the above account, as well as Ryan's (1998) outline of Women's Studies, make visible a number of questions that arose about the role of Women's Studies in the academy. Many disputes among feminists, inside and outside the academy, relate to the perceived role of Women's Studies. As a field of knowledge, it has not always been clear what direction or content matter Women's Studies should adopt. Sheridan sums up these concerns:

debates around women's studies in the academy include whether its principal role should be the critique of existing disciplines and traditions of thought ... or the construction of a new interdisciplinary model of knowledge production; whether its energies should be directed towards transforming the general curriculum or establishing its own autonomous existence and concerns; whether women's studies is by definition in conflict with the present structures of educational institutions, especially their hierarchies of personnel, assessment procedures, and teaching/research priorities; how far its work can be relevant and useful to the women's movement; and finally, what its relationship should be to women's studies projects in other educational fields, especially adult and community education, where much unpaid women's labour is expended in offering courses to the majority of women who are still educationally disadvantaged even in the affluent west (Sheridan 1990, p 37).¹⁶⁰

Sheridan hints at the cataclysmic shifts below the surface of Women's Studies. Within each university there were liberal, radical, socialist, and poststructuralist feminists fighting it out at the margins. One of the more significant signs of these struggles is captured in the re-naming of Women's Studies to Gender Studies.

The Issue of Naming

Academic feminism or Women's Studies has had a relatively recent name change to Gender Studies.¹⁶¹ The shift in nomenclature, which began in the late 1980s in Australia, signalled a pre-existed tension among feminists. However, for some, the name change contributed to a shift in the focus of Women's Studies, even though the name change attempted to address or signal changes in the way issues were framed. In particular, Gender Studies signals the shift from a social sciences focus to a cultural studies focus, and a shift from an analysis of the man/woman dichotomy to a critique of the binary, to analysis of differences among women, queer studies and feminine alterity (Threadgold 2000a, p 40). Indeed, the new title was said to be especially important given the rise of queer theory and the inclusion of 'masculinities' in Women's Studies courses.¹⁶² The name change also signals a broader acceptance of a deconstructive critique of 'woman' as an essential category of analysis that came in response to both theoretical work and critiques of the white

¹⁶⁰ How to define Women's Studies has been a national and international concern. For a US example see Brown (1997) and for an Australian example see Threadgold (2000a).

¹⁶¹ For some universities Gender Studies was used in the late 1980s, for instance, at UNSW (Woodland 1990, p 26) and University of Wollongong (Woodland 1990, p 37).

¹⁶² According to Carole Ferrier the shift to Gender Studies, as a focus in teaching, has not been very widespread. She states that this is mainly because "the new masculinity studies (like whiteness studies) threaten in some of their incarnations to return us to the preoccupations of the 1950s with clean white boys" (Ferrier 2003, p 15)

middle class nature of feminism from women of colour. Deconstruction also challenged the normativity of the unified subject, rationality, binary thinking and so on, that 'feminism' was prey to. Using a deconstructive approach postcolonial critics and women of colour denounced white middle class feminism. For some, however, the name change was seen as diminishing the focus on women and silencing critical issues in Women's Studies (Threadgold 2000a, p 40). This sentiment is clearly expressed by Klein:

to rename Women's Studies and call it Gender Studies ... is the beginning of eclipsing WS, both by making women invisible (again) – gender is such a neutral term – and by allowing men into feminist space (Klein 1991, p 129).

The above quote is representative of a radical feminist position. Radical academic feminists, like Klein and Rowland, were trying to keep the name Women's Studies as a way of staying in touch with the goals of the Women's Liberation Movement.¹⁶³ For Klein, the name change from Women's Studies to Gender Studies brought with it an "obsession with 'difference'" (Klein 1991, p 129). In addition she states that implicit within these new knowledges

is much talk about 'individual pleasure' promoted under the guise of 'choice.' Political thought and action is 'out', 'in' is a libertarian ideology that fosters individualism and is centred around 'difference' (Klein 1991, p 129).

This quote demonstrates the edginess that permeated the 'sisterhood'. For others, the name change accurately reflects feminism's theoretical shift from predominately a critique of philosophy to extending and (re)inventing philosophical premises. Moreover, it also marks a new understanding of the political that is not confined to traditional notions of political change.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that the conditions under which Women's Studies was established in Australian universities impacted on the way that deconstruction was received. Because of Women's Studies' connection to the Women's Liberation Movement in the early days, political action, understood in the traditional Marxist sense, dominated Women's Studies courses and research. The purpose of Women's Studies in the academy was a contentious issue. Thus philosophy, especially

¹⁶³ Robyn Rowland has since retired from academia.

continental philosophy, and its interest in feminist theory, was treated with suspicion inside and outside the academy, because it was seen as abstract, patriarchal and non-political. Nonetheless, deconstruction over this period made massive inroads to new fields of knowledge, it encouraged vigorous debate and led to widespread curriculum changes. Ultimately, as even its critics cited above attest, deconstruction could not be ignored by Women's Studies academics. The next chapter will look at the theoretical directions of Women's Studies in Australia, focusing in particular on how deconstruction has come to be seen as a useful philosophy for some feminists.

Chapter 5: Australian Feminists' Theoretical Concerns

Introduction

This chapter aims to identify a coming together of a variety of forces that produced the possibilities for deconstruction in Australia. The beginnings of deconstruction in Australia can be traced to a period spanning the years 1980 to 1985. From 1985 onwards, a variety of deconstructive work had started to take hold within the Australian academy. In particular, this chapter examines the significance of deconstruction for Australian feminism. As feminism in Australia is a broad category that has resonance for many disparate groups of women, this chapter will focus on particular trends in academic feminism: usually termed Women's Studies or Gender Studies. The intention is not to coalesce ideas about Australian feminisms, but rather to further complicate and decentre dominant meanings by focusing on the impact of deconstruction on academic currents within feminism. This chapter argues that the type of deconstruction practiced by Australian feminists (academic and grassroots) was influenced by theoretical engagement with Marxist and socialist theory. While this is by no means a comprehensive or definitive account of Australian academic feminists' engagement with deconstruction, it does provide some context within which to frame an argument.

This chapter traces the emergence of deconstruction in Women's Studies as well as the kinds of responses it provoked: how deconstruction was used, where it was picked up and developed.¹⁶⁴ Very little has been written on the history of Women's/Gender Studies in the university and even less on the links between deconstruction and feminism.

¹⁶⁴ The methodology for this chapter draws loosely on the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault's work is useful because it helps to create a structure for understanding the emergence of new ideas. Following Foucault, the chapter attempts to map the rules of formation and conditions of possibility of specific discourses. Moreover, a Foucauldian methodology rejects theories that reflect the optimism of a liberal ideology and its belief in continuous progress. Therefore, rather than look for chronological or causal developments, this chapter explores the lateral or oblique connections which enabled deconstruction to be realised. This chapter will explore deconstruction and its formation as a knowledge or discourse by tracing events that produced its existence (Foucault 1970; 1980).

The idea of the subject as a unified subject and an agent of political change (based on activism and revolutionary change), which was an aspect of Australian liberation feminism at its peak in the 1970s, has lent itself in a particular way to the poststructuralist feminism of today. Perhaps, elements of poststructuralism *always already* influenced Australian feminist theory. This chapter draws on some of the connections between the theoretical predilections of liberation feminism and the focus of poststructuralist feminism. Moreover, it locates some theoretical preoccupations that led to Australian feminism's unique engagement with deconstruction.

The conditions of possibility for deconstruction in Australia, in the main, came out of an engagement with progressive socialist/Marxist theory and psychoanalysis. Like Marxism, feminist deconstruction in Australia initially developed out of philosophy departments with an interest in continental philosophy (for example, Elizabeth Grosz and Moira Gatens at Sydney University), comparative literature departments (for example Anne Freadman at the University of Queensland), and cultural studies (for example, Anna Gibbs at Murdoch University). While this chapter comments on all three strains (literature, cultural studies and philosophy), it will focus on the developments in philosophy. Particularly important was the work done at the University of Sydney. Women's Studies as an academic knowledge was facilitated by the inroads made by Marxists in the academy, especially in philosophy departments.¹⁶⁵ However, for some feminists, Women's Studies' initial alliances with Marxism proved to be inadequate to the Women's Studies' project.¹⁶⁶ Thus, it is more accurate to say that deconstruction emerged in counter distinction to the socialist/Marxist methodology prevalent in philosophy departments in the 1970s.

¹⁶⁵ According to Penny Ryan "[w]e are very lucky to be situated within the Discipline of Philosophy at Flinders, for, despite all its faults, it is by far the most radical and democratic in the entire university. This is terribly important to Women's Studies" (Ryan 1975b, p 41).

¹⁶⁶ As discussed in relation to the split in philosophy teaching at Sydney University in Chapter Four. Michèle Barrett claims that some feminists took up Foucault's work in an attempt to deal with some of the inadequacies of Marxism, for instance see Sawicki (1991) and Ramazanoglu (1993). In the mid 1980s, Marxism was experiencing major turmoil, partly because of the critiques from feminism and partly due to the demise of the Soviet Empire. Committed socialists like Zillah Eisenstein declared that "socialism seems to hold out little new theoretical or political promise for feminism" (Eisenstein, cited in Segal 1991, p 90). Critiques of Marxism came from poststructuralist theorists like Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard and Lacan. Some Marxist feminists, like Barrett, "turned away from the material conditions of oppression, which relied on a 'scientific Marxism', to a symbolic account of women's oppression based on difference" (Barrett 1987, p 34).

From the 1980s, three significant developments in Women's Studies took up deconstruction to address the perceived shortcomings of Marxism, namely philosophical theories of embodiment (Elizabeth Grosz, Moira Gatens, and others), the introduction of cultural studies programs with an emphasis on the split subject and cultural constructions of nationalism (Meaghan Morris, Kay Schaffer, and others), English and comparative literature with an emphasis on discourse and poststructural approaches to language (Terry Threadgold, and others).

The discussion of opposition to deconstruction in Australia is not complete without reference to the theory/practice debates within feminism. These debates are very complicated, as they are composed of several aspects, which are not always separated in the debates. Furthermore, some feminists relate to more than one position. In general, the positions taken up are: feminists who are opposed to theory as they think that it detracts from practice, which should be the main goal of feminism; feminists who are opposed to certain kinds of theories, unless they have direct political application; and feminists who are particularly opposed to poststructural theories, especially deconstruction, because of its opacity and attachment to the high theory of the male avant-garde. This chapter will focus on the second and third aspects of the theory/practice arguments.

Although deconstruction is now a common term in Australia, it is frequently used inappropriately, dismissively, or superficially. In other words, in spite of the proliferation of primary and secondary texts dating back to the late 1970s, distrust and suspicion of deconstruction has been widespread among feminists in Australia. Feminist protagonists engaged in debates about the usefulness of deconstruction often attach different meanings to key terms such as 'politics' and 'theory', which are neither shared nor explicated. Moreover, some radical feminists are clear on the importance of politics but are sceptical concerning the importance of theory, while poststructural feminists challenge the distinction between theory and practice (as a false binary). As demonstrated in Chapter Two, misunderstandings arise when feminists attach different meanings to significant terms, for instance, is 'woman' an autonomous and self-determining subject or is she a discursively constituted split subject with multiple meanings? These differences mean that, for some feminists

(mostly radical or socialist), politics is defined as a ‘revolution against patriarchy’, while for others (mostly poststructuralists) ‘a politics’ of feminism is concerned with questioning or deconstructing premises within liberal/socialist discourses, such as deconstructing binaries and phallogentric codes and practices. This chapter demonstrates that misunderstandings around critical concepts such as ‘theory’ and ‘practice’, or more often ‘politics’, were, and in some cases still are, a significant part of the resistance to deconstruction in Australia.

Deconstruction, or more broadly poststructural philosophical thought, had no particular ‘origins’ in Australia, rather it had many disseminations. From 1981 onwards deconstruction began to appear rhizomatically at conferences, in grant applications, in Women’s Studies courses, in the orientation of journal articles, and other pockets throughout Australia. These pockets or undercurrents sometimes coalesced, veered, and came closer together until there was an eruption in thought, so that a discourse within feminism regarding deconstruction became more commonplace. From 1985 one could read the recognition of deconstruction as a significant strand of feminism in a number of locations, especially at Sydney University. Due to its rhizomatic or subterranean effects, it is impossible to locate all of the traces that contributed to the possibility for deconstruction in Australia. Therefore, this chapter traces a particular genealogy that highlights the connection between ‘the academic left’ and poststructuralism. Nevertheless, it is important to note the connection between deconstruction and cultural studies in Australia, as this is where deconstruction has made a particularly important contribution. In addition, many cultural studies deconstructive projects have a feminist emphasis. However, this strand is not explored in much detail in this thesis as it was not always directly relevant to Women’s Studies.

What follows is not an attempt to construct a ‘myth of origins’, rather to argue that a constellation of disparate forces including disciplinary formations (especially in Cultural Studies and Women’s Studies) and theoretical influences (local and international) from philosophy and psychoanalysis combined with Australian specificities made deconstruction possible in Australia.

(False) Divide or Dichotomy Between a Political Feminism and an Academic Feminism¹⁶⁷

Critics will ask themselves with equal intensity, 'What is the point of this work I do? Does it relate intrinsically to anything that is genuinely important in my life or in the world at large?' (Patton 1991, p 276).

Paul Patton's concerns resonate in the debates between rights/access (modernist) feminism and symbolic representation feminism (poststructuralist), especially given that feminism emerged out of a strong socio/political imperative. It is due to the political nature of feminism that it cannot altogether be seen as a disinterested theoretical perspective. Many feminists have tried to define feminism by policing its borders, for instance, Liz Stanley's work on what constitutes feminist research, and whether men have a place in feminism, and if so, what that should be.¹⁶⁸

There has been a concern in Australia about the direction of feminism and feminist theory. This concern is partly due to a fear of change from a particular imagined pristine origin that for some can only mean loss.¹⁶⁹ The feminist movement began as a grassroots movement suspicious of philosophy and what it could offer. Philosophy was seen, and with good cause, as another way to oppress women. Deconstruction as a 'philosophy of the limit', to quote Cornell, has further alienated some feminists (Cornell 1992b). The disjuncture evident between philosophy and feminism is symptomatic of a serious problem that is evident across various other disciplines in Australia and overseas. In a world that is increasingly dominated by economic rationalism, where universities are run akin to commercial enterprises, there is a concern that philosophy will be further relegated into the marginal and obsolete. Clearly, the accepted critiques of philosophy that emanate mostly out of an engagement with analytic philosophy¹⁷⁰ (and tend to stop at Nietzsche) will retain a widespread presence at universities, but an engagement with what is commonly

¹⁶⁷The binary authentic/inauthentic, like all binaries, operates on a system dependent on privilege and suppression.

¹⁶⁸ For example, see Stanley (1990) and Jardine and Smith (1987).

¹⁶⁹ See, for instance, Barry (1991).

¹⁷⁰ Analytic philosophy "has dominated the English-speaking world for the last sixty years" (Follesdal 1996, p 193). Analytic philosophy focuses on logic, or philosophy as a science. It initially gained prominence as a reaction against the idealism and metaphysics of Bishop Berkely, but later opposed phenomenology and existentialism, see Follesdal (1996).

referred to as Continental philosophy struggles for recognition. At this point in time, it is accurate to say that so-called Continental philosophy has very little place in philosophy departments. Instead, English, Gender Studies, Cultural Studies and Language departments are sites for this type of critical thinking, but this raises its own problems, some of which are mentioned later in this chapter.

Derrida claims that, for him, deconstruction was “a kind of departure from the university” (Derrida et al. 1985, p 5). It was aimed to “an intellectual or cultural or literary milieu which was not defined by its links to the academy” (Derrida et al. 1985, p 5). Meaghan Morris and John Frow make a similar claim for the location of Cultural Studies in Australia, especially in the early years (Frow and Morris 1993). However, there is an argument to be made that in Australia (and the US and England) intellectual debate is currently located within the University.¹⁷¹ Derrida also notes that:

What distinguishes the United States for me [Derrida] from a European place ... is that all intellectual and cultural life is concentrated – in any case to a large extent – in the university (Derrida et al. 1985, p 5).

Especially obvious in Australia, like the United States, is the absence of “avant-garde milieux involved in experimental research into literature, philosophy and so forth, which claims to be anti-university” (Derrida et al. 1985, p 8). Thus, the academy becomes an important site for intellectual debate in countries like Australia and the United States.

Furthermore, Derrida argues that deconstruction, as a gesture or movement, acquires particular meanings when restricted to the university. Moreover, as James Creech points out, literature (and not philosophy) departments mainly take up deconstruction. Australia like the United States cannot boast of a strong

¹⁷¹ This point refers to a comment made by Jane Flax in Adelaide (Australia) at a conference entitled *Narratives For a New Millennium* (2000) in response to a paper given by Mary Walsh. Walsh was suggesting that Political Theory as a school of thought was denigrated in favour of an empirical scientific/industrial approach more akin to Political Science. The academy, according to Walsh is responding to the market driven incentives offered by industry instead of less lucrative philosophical investigations. Jane Flax added that this was happening across the board in universities. She asked the question: Where is there a space for the engaged intellectual? (If not in the academy?). Derrida in an interview with Imre Salusinszky claims that, in France at least, philosophy is not something that happens only at a University (Derrida 1986a). Unlike France, for instance, philosophy is not a compulsory subject in Australian high schools – in fact, in most state schools it is not offered at all.

philosophical tradition, such as is apparent in Europe. Therefore, Creech states that “because it [deconstruction] is cut off from the roots of a certain philosophical tradition, deconstruction becomes superficial and ‘formulaic’” (Derrida et al. 1985, p 9). Indeed, critics of deconstruction respond to the ‘formulaic’ accounts. As Derrida puts it:

the poor literature types ... have become victims of a kind of philosophical mystification, an import product, contraband that they were not solidly enough prepared to criticize (Derrida et al. 1985, p 10).

To avoid this type of engagement with deconstruction (or any philosophical theory) philosophical research needs to be promoted in Women’s Studies courses. Unfortunately, the current Australian Government’s commitment to education has resulted in severe funding cuts to universities. Up-front fees for some undergraduate and most post-graduate courses have forced Arts and Humanities departments to rethink commitment to purely philosophical research as they are in dire need of funding – and students are less willing to pay for courses that do not lead obviously to high-paying careers. Consequently, economic concerns spurred on by globalization have increased the tension and division between what is referred to as an academic feminism as opposed to a grassroots (political) movement. Nonetheless, the distinction between an academic feminism and a political feminism is not a contemporary problem. On the contrary, it has plagued feminism for some time, both in Australia (since the inception of academic feminism in 1975) and the US. According to Jane Gallop:

In the feminist imaginary, the academy tends to be suspect, a patriarchal institution. In US society at large, ‘feminist’ and ‘intellectual’ too often line up as mutually exclusive alternatives. ... Because US society is massively anti-intellectual, I have lately felt militant in defence of the right to think actively and freely and, above all, to promote thinking in others. ‘Academic feminist’ has largely been perceived as a compromised, shameful identity (Gallop, quoted in Paglia et al. 1999, p 216-217).

Likewise, Robyn Ferrell is concerned that in Australia there is “a deeply irreconcilable contest between” a “political program on behalf of women compete[ing] with an epistemological claim” (Ferrell 1999, p 40).

Antagonism directed at academic feminism is partly due to a dominant thread in feminist praxis that aligns itself (albeit unbeknown to itself) with an egalitarian

politics.¹⁷² Julia Kristeva's critical account of the move away from 'equality' feminism to 'difference' feminism in the academy is specifically about egalitarian claims in Eastern European countries. Nonetheless, Kristeva's musings have salience for egalitarian feminisms operating in other countries, like Australia. Kristeva claims that:

It could be said with only slight exaggeration, that the demands of the suffragists and existential feminists have, to a great extent, been met in these countries [Eastern Europe], since three of the main egalitarian demands of early feminism have been or are now being implemented despite vagaries and blunders: economic, political and professional equality. The fourth, sexual equality, which implies permissiveness in sexual relations (including homosexual relations), abortion and contraception, remains stricken by taboo in Marxian ethics as well as for reasons of state. It is, then, this fourth equality which is the problem and which therefore appears *essential* in the struggle of a new generation. But simultaneously and as a consequence of these socialist accomplishments which are in fact a total deception - the struggle is no longer concerned with the quest for equality but, rather, with difference and specificity. It is precisely at this point that the new generation encounters what might be called the *symbolic* question. Sexual difference - which is at once biological, physiological and relative to reproduction - is translated by and translated a difference in the relationship of subjects to the symbolic contract which *is* the social contract: a difference, then, in the relationship to power, language and meaning (Kristeva 1986, p 196, author's emphasis).¹⁷³

Perhaps Kristeva's account of the socialist project of equality is rather optimistic and far from a lived reality, at least in an Australian context. However, it is with the above in mind that Irigaray emphatically states that "sexual difference is one of the questions, if not *the* question to be thought in our age" (Irigaray, cited in Whitford 1991, p 9). Indeed it is out of the crisis over sexual difference that poststructuralism emerged - of which contemporary French theory is at the centre (Jardine 1985, p 25). In other words, both feminism and poststructuralism have struggled with the issue of sexual difference. As stated earlier, Seyla Benhabib makes reference to the similarities between feminism and postmodernism in her term, "elective affinity" (Benhabib 1992, p 213). The most important of these affinities is an interest in how the Cartesian subject deals with issues of sexual difference. Therefore, to suggest that feminism is confined to egalitarian concerns will only lead to achieving, or improving, (limited) material conditions that seem to depend more on the prosperity of the country, the government priorities/political leadership and domestic ideologies at any given time than on feminist activism and theory.

¹⁷² There is a risk here of homogenising Australian feminism and feminist goals. However, in the main, most historical accounts of Australian feminist history are a record of egalitarian wins. For example, see Lake (1999).

¹⁷³ This article was written before the fall of the Berlin wall.

For example, in times of unemployment or economic hardship it is women's rights that are reviewed (read compromised).¹⁷⁴

Part of the problem is that when feminism is entrenched in an equality politics, it lacks philosophical awareness and adopts a narrow perception of the political. The political project implicit in the work of Kristeva and Irigaray is certainly not as immediate as, for instance, an equal pay rally. However, Irigaray's is a long-term project that will empower subjects (women and men) to think in a space where it is possible to define oneself in a language that does not determine or limit possibilities for being. In other words, like Derrida, Irigaray is interested in fundamental, radical changes, which shape the way in which subjects think themselves.

The Precursors of Deconstruction

One of the implications of Women's Studies evolution from the Women's Liberation Movement is the dominance of socialist and radical feminist theories.¹⁷⁵ This return to basics provides the structural frameworks in which ideas about

¹⁷⁴ The second tendency 'is to characterize women's movements as products of modernization or development', their success a feature of western nations rather than of developing ones. Political economists Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, in *Rising Tide*, link capitalist and democratic expansion with women's rights, claiming that 'human development' fuels "more egalitarian attitudes toward women" and that secularism, individualism and "modernization bring systematic, predictable improvements in women's position" (Inglehart and Norris 2003, p 149, 154). Similarly, Estelle Freedman bluntly asserts that "the market economies and democratic systems that now dominate the world create both the need for feminism and the means to sustain it" (Freedman 2002, p 1-2). Only democracy and capitalism will free women from the patriarchal control of family and tradition. Individualist consumerist identities are empowering but collectivist kin membership is not: the white wedding signals the modern liberated woman, an arranged marriage does not. In the west, academics and taxi drivers alike presume that only western women are 'developed' or have 'human rights' (Mohanty 1991), and so no longer need a women's movement. Such distinctions between a backward patriarchal 'them' and a modernising human rights-oriented 'us' are not confined to the Anglophone west, but can also be found in the denigration of North Korean settlers in South Korea: using "gender relations as a marker for the modernization process" (Choo 2006, p 593). By contrast with this celebration of western women's post-feminist empowerment, a more pessimistic reading of the Australian situation suggests *The End of Equality*, not because women have achieved gender equality, but because "we have stopped even having the national conversation about women's entitlements and women's rights" (Summers 2003, p 6-7), 'we' being both the government and a robust women's movement. In Britain, Lynne Segal wonders whether feminism "has become little more than a blip in the march of economic neo-liberalism" (Segal 1999, p 1), while Chandra Mohanty (2003, p 221) says of the USA: "with the increasing privatization and corporatization of public life, it has become much harder to discern such a women's movement [vibrant, transnational] from the United States (although women's movements are thriving around the world)" (Mohanty 2003, p 221). See also Epstein (2001, p 2, 5).

¹⁷⁵ For a personal history of Marxism's relationship to the Women's Liberation Movement see Ann Curthoys (1988).

‘women’ emerged within Women’s Studies and were subsequently contested. It also serves as a background for the subsequent discussion.

Socialist feminism developed out of a Marxist paradigm. Socialist feminism engages with several other theories which are important for thinking about the conditions of possibility for deconstruction: these are Radical Feminism and psychoanalysis.¹⁷⁶

Socialist Feminism

Combining the insights of Marxism, Radical Feminism and psychoanalysis (to a lesser degree), socialist feminists aimed to overthrow the social order, described as capitalist patriarchy. Basically, socialist feminists drew on a class analysis from Marxism (reproduction and labour) and a gender analysis from radical feminism (including the ‘personal is political’, reproduction, family, and sexuality). The main issue socialist feminists had with a Marxist analysis is that privileging class over gender does not sufficiently take into account the extent of women’s oppression nor does it explain why women are oppressed even where capitalism does not exist.¹⁷⁷ Particularly influential in Australia was the work of British feminists Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright in their attempt to ‘marry’ Marxism with feminism.¹⁷⁸ After Juliet Mitchell’s *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* the role of psychoanalysis further complicated definitions of ‘patriarchy’ by

¹⁷⁶ Australian feminists were influenced by British radical socialism, however, the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective emphasis was also important. The text *Our Bodies Our Selves* (first published in USA in 1971, adapted in 1978 for British readers, revised in 1985 as *The New Our Bodies Ourselves*) came out of the Boston Women’s Conference of 1969, when a group of women met and continued to meet to discuss women’s health issues (Boston Women’s Health Book Collective 1973, p 2). From this collective, the impact of violence against women was brought out into the open. Rape Crisis Centres and Women’s Health Centres were set up. In Australia, the Leichhardt Women’s Health Centre was opened in 1974 (Schofield 1998, p 125). There was a strong emphasis on breaking the silence surrounding women’s sexual violence; *Our Bodies Our Selves* was a key text, sold in every bookstore and taught in Women’s studies courses. As a result, sexuality became a part of the Women’s Studies Curriculum (Boston Women’s Health Book Collective 1984, p 6).

¹⁷⁷ Anne Summers, a founding members of the Adelaide WLM, wrote that in the early days: We were from the left, we called ourselves Marxists, and we all had husbands or boyfriends who shared our politics, so it seemed natural that they would start to attend our meetings, particularly as they were eager to involve themselves in this new cause. *They were not the enemy. We saw nothing personal in the movement, nothing that might impinge on our own lives. It was an intellectual issue, not an emotional one, driven not by anger but by a sense of fairness and equity* (Summers 1999, p 259, author’s emphasis).

¹⁷⁸ See *Beyond the Fragments* (1979) – an attempt to unite Marxism and Feminism (Rowbotham et al. 1979).

introducing the symbolic power of men, especially as fathers, using theories of the unconscious developed by Freud (Mitchell 1974).

Like most theories, socialist feminist theories are not homogeneous. For instance, important differences exist around definitions of ‘patriarchy’ and ‘capitalism’. While there is some consensus on a definition for ‘capitalism’, there are disputes over how to define ‘patriarchy’. Socialist feminists throughout the 1970s and 1980s debated questions like: Is it a material structure, historically rooted, embedded in the psyche or a combination of all three? Do all women experience patriarchy in the same way? Do all women occupy the same standpoint? Does it make sense to talk of capitalism outside of patriarchy? What does an alternative to patriarchy look like? Is socialist patriarchy better than capitalist patriarchy?¹⁷⁹

Two dominant strands of feminism were evident in Australia during the 1970s and into the 1980s, a strong Marxist feminism derived from the UK and a strong radical feminism derived from the US (Curthoys 1998, p 41–47). Ann Curthoys states that:

Given the interest by Australian feminists in intellectual development in both countries, and the continuation of local conflicts over Marxist versus radical feminist theory, both strands of feminism were well read in Australia through the latter half of the 1970s and into the 1980s (Curthoys 1998, p 46).

While socialist feminism was strong in Australia there were still those who thought that Marxism, with its primary emphasis on class struggle no matter how modified, could not provide adequate answers to feminist questions (Mitchell 1971; 1974).¹⁸⁰

Radical Feminism

Radical feminism is said to have come out of the 1960s. Kate Millet and Shulamith Firestone from the USA, and Germaine Greer in Australia, were instrumental in shaping it (Firestone 1970; Greer 1970; Millet 1970). The focus of radical theories was on patriarchy, which stood for ‘all men’ and not just institutions, ‘the personal’ including the critique of the private/public binary, reproduction, marriage and so on.

¹⁷⁹ For the purpose of this thesis it is not important to note the distinctions, but for a more comprehensive account of the differences between socialist feminist theorists, see Sargent (1981), and in particular Hartmann (1981), and Young (1981).

¹⁸⁰ For a personal account of feminism’s engagement with Marxism, see Summers (1972, p 10).

Radical feminists advocated a ‘women centred approach’ – gender was at the centre of all analysis – and some advocated a separatist politics for women, sometimes aligned to lesbian sexuality. The goal was to find an alternative to patriarchy. In their attempts, some feminists reversed the man/woman binary by privileging all that is associated with the feminine, which for some critics, led to essentialism.¹⁸¹ ‘Cultural feminism’ was used to describe feminists who refuse essentialist arguments, but otherwise retain a radical feminist stance. In other words, ‘difference feminists’ revalorised feminine as opposed to masculine traits in order to reverse the binary, but they cited culture rather than nature as the origin/cause of gender difference. Carol Gilligan was one of the main proponents of this type of feminism (Diprose 1998). Most maternalist feminists focused on women’s ‘superior qualities’ due to either their biological or social role as mothers. By claiming that the feminine needs to be valued – women as mothers, nurturers – they minimise the radical impact of feminism and continue to support the gender-based divisions in social roles (although maternalist and difference feminists argued that it is a necessary part of their vision that women receive more rewards for doing what is most important in society – reproduction of people). For some radical feminists there was an emphasis on individual change (political lesbianism as the key to liberation) rather than change through government policy or mass social change. For others, male sexuality was the enemy; some key figures include Mary Daly, Robin Morgan, and Adrienne Rich. In Australia during the 1980s Judith Allen, a feminist historian and the first Chair of Women’s Studies in an Australian university, was a strong and influential advocate of radical feminism (J Curthoys 1994, p 21).¹⁸²

Many political goals were met using the tools of liberal, socialist and radical feminist theories. Liberal feminism argued that women were human like men (and therefore equal to men), but suffered from social disadvantage: if this was overcome with provisions like childcare women could enter the public realm on the same terms as men. Indeed, it was because of these gains that women could enter establishments

¹⁸¹ From a philosophical point of view essentialist arguments are problematic. To claim that all women’s and men’s differences are based on biology fails to recognize specific (historical) cultural and social conditions. Moreover, one quality (physiology) is used to explain difference for all women at all times in all places. An essentialist argument will inevitably suppress difference among women.

¹⁸² Professor Judith Allen was appointed as professor of women’s studies at Griffith University in August 1990 (Bulbeck 1990, p 49).

previously considered impenetrable, such as the university, parliament, and corporate business. Socialist, liberal and radical theories readily lend themselves to feminist political objectives. However, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, Australian feminists were becoming aware of the limitations of the theoretical paradigms they were employing. Michaela Kronemann refers to this period as the crisis that followed “those heady days” of the early Women’s Movement (Kronemann 1981, p 215). According to Kronemann:

By the mid-1970s, there was a general feeling that feminist theory had reached an impasse; the contradictions between feminism as a holistic theory, a way of life, on the one hand, and on the other, as an integral and secondary part of the struggle against capitalism, had become acute. In the face of the failure to resolve these issues of theory and strategy, the debate dissolved into fragmentation and sectarianism as the movement itself exploded into a seemingly infinite welter of activities and perspectives. (Kronemann 1981, p 215).

Kronemann refers to three “streams of thought within the feminist movement”: the reformists (liberal feminists), radical feminists and socialist feminists. During the same period, Marion Simms also pointed to “contemporary feminism as having reached a crossroads” (Simms 1981, p 227). Like Kronemann, Simms remarks on the feminist project of “spring-cleaning Marxism” (Simms 1981, p 229). To demonstrate her point, she discusses two feminist groups, namely the Women’s Liberation Movement and WEL (Women’s Electoral Lobby), and their impact on women’s issues in various states in Australia. In particular, she highlights the tension between theoretical positions, both within these groups and between these groups. She characterises the tension as a division between those who adopt socialist/Marxist, liberal/democratic, and radical feminist viewpoints. According to Simms:

Both WEL and NOW made conscious efforts to operate differently from male organisations but within a framework of adopting liberal-democratic models of the overall political process. In contradistinction, socialist feminists repudiated that model and developed a distinctly Marxist feminist view of the State, distinguishing between short term reforms and longer range revolutionary aims. Radical feminists shared their revolutionary impetus and anti-capitalist stance but rejected or lacked a class analysis (Simms 1981, p 237).

WEL and the Women’s Liberation Movement also differed in regard to their basic structure. WEL was “a reformist organisation” with “moderate tactics” (Wills 1983, p 311) while the Women’s Liberation Movement was “radical and revolutionary”

and was prepared to use “militant and confrontationist tactics” (Wills 1983, p 311, 312).¹⁸³

The triad of liberal-radical-Marxist/socialist feminism has become characterised as sameness-difference feminism, which was pitted against deconstruction/poststructuralist feminism.¹⁸⁴ Below is an account of liberal feminism.

Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism is located within a humanist paradigm. According to early liberal feminists, like Harriet Taylor and Mary Wollstonecraft, what makes us human is our capacity to reason or be rational.¹⁸⁵ These feminists argued that women’s inferiority was not innate or inevitable but a result of exclusion, for instance being denied access to education and economic independence. Equality is the main goal of liberal feminism: egalitarian rights will secure women’s emancipation. Liberalism is based on reformist politics rather than revolutionary politics, as it operates within the existing political system. In other words, liberalism assumes that the structures of society (law, politics, education and so on) are ungendered and therefore unproblematic. For liberal feminists, therefore, inclusion of women into these institutions would bring about equality.

From the 1980s, there was a growing dissatisfaction with liberal theory’s ability to deal with class divisions and racial oppressions as well as women’s difference (as alterity) and a dawning awareness of phallogocentrism in its multiple forms across discipline fields and activist circles (to a lesser degree). The principles that liberalism is founded upon rest heavily upon Enlightenment notions, which at their foundations progress human equality that ultimately relies on gender inequality (Lloyd 1984;1989;1993). Liberalist assumptions of equality under the law meant that there was no room for ‘difference’ except as inferiority. Women’s rights

¹⁸³ See also Katy Reade’s (1994) account of the differences between WEL and Women’s Liberation Movement.

¹⁸⁴ See Weedon (1987, especially p 1-42) and Oakley (1997).

¹⁸⁵ For a more detailed account of liberal feminism see Chapter 2. Moreover, Chapter 2 also discusses the Sameness/Difference debates that commenced in the late 1970s.

platforms revolved around the sameness-difference axis, which meant that legislative reform was not possible without making women into honorary men (Bacchi 1990). In other words, “the female body limits women’s capacity for equality and transcendence; it’s a hindrance to be overcome” (Grosz 1994, p 15). As a result, women who entered the workforce had to forgo mothering and care-giving roles to become workers, like men, in order to succeed (Pocock 2003). As a result, including women in institutions denied to them in the past has not significantly altered society, nor brought about equality for women as a group, although some individual women have benefited. Liberal discourses are particularly prevalent in Australian legal and educational sectors. Thus, it is not surprising that in a liberal capitalist democracy most of the gains achieved by the women’s movement fitted within a liberal feminist framework (Simms 1981).

Liberal, socialist and radical feminist theory was important in establishing Australian feminist theory. However, as stated above, socialist/Marxist and radical feminism were dominant in the Women’s Liberation Movement; though, socialist/Marxist feminism survived more successfully in the academy than radical feminism. It is in tension and conflict with mainly socialist theories (and to a lesser extent liberal feminism) that many Women’s Studies academics turned to poststructural theories.

Theoretical Influences on Academic Feminism; Or, From Revolution to Deconstruction

The following section will discuss the influence of psychoanalysis, Continental philosophy and particularly the work of Michel Foucault and Luce Irigaray on the adoption of deconstruction in Australia. The section argues that the above three currents, in particular, acted as the main precursors to deconstruction in Australia. By way of introduction it is interesting to note that by the mid-1970s, pockets within the arts faculties of Sydney University and Melbourne University had a strong culture of Marxist informed theories. In the General Philosophy department (after the split) at Sydney University there was an interest in not only Marxism but also Althusserian Marxism. Small journals like *Working Papers* (formerly *Gay Liberation Press* 1972-3) in Sydney and *Intervention* in Melbourne were important in fostering early debates about the role of French theory in Australia (Lewis 2003, p

194).¹⁸⁶ In addition, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* by Foucault was published in English in 1970 and was widely read (Foucault 1970).¹⁸⁷ These distinct, and sometime conflicting, theoretical positions set the scene for deconstruction in Australia.

Foucault: The Initial Point of Contact

Michel Foucault and Marxism/Neo-Marxism

For some philosophers, including Derrida and Foucault, Marxism was seen to be the last attempt at a systematic approach to understanding the world. However, after the failure of the 1968 uprising in Paris, Foucault, Derrida and others rejected Marxism and any theory that sought to explain and overthrow the structures of society as a whole.¹⁸⁸

According to Pauline Johnson “scientific Marxist feminism proved decisive in the development of Australian feminist theory” (Johnson 1998, p 209). Dissatisfaction with ‘scientific Marxism’ due to its failure “to provide a diagnosis of the dynamics that had generated the new critical consciousness” and “to provide the means to distinguish radical, progressive changes, leading to the democratisation of women’s lives, from changes that merely reproduced repressive gender ideologies” led to a move towards French theory, particularly the work of Michel Foucault (Johnson 1998, p 209-210). Foucault’s attack on Hegelian Marxism (the repression/emancipation model), especially on the possibility of producing a free self-determining subject, resonated with Australian feminists.¹⁸⁹ According to Johnson:

¹⁸⁶ In 1981 *Art and Text* was published in response to the “conservatism of Australian art criticism” and it was “a major site for the dissemination and application of postmodern theories” (Henderson 1998, p 4).

¹⁸⁷ Other important influences included Juliet Mitchell’s *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* published in 1974, which invigorated debates about the importance of French theories, such as Lacanianism for the New Left.

¹⁸⁸ For more details of the May 1968 uprising, see Chapter 2. The disillusion caused by this event, and by the re-election of the de Gaulle government despite mass protests, directed attention to concerns which are now seen as ‘postmodern’, for example the move to the specific and the local.

¹⁸⁹ In other words, Foucault rejected the humanist concept of an autonomous or ‘free’ subject, and instead focused on how a subject is constructed within social and political contexts. For more details see Sawicki (1991, p 102-104).

Foucault's anti-humanism appealed to an already largely colonised territory. With Foucault, Australian feminist theory learnt to systematise its own anti-humanist convictions. All investments in the emancipatory pretensions of an enlightenment aspiration towards the production of a self-legislating human subject were to be withdrawn. Foucault's anti-humanism insisted that the idea of self-determining autonomous subjectivity, product of the disciplinary society, was too thoroughly contaminated by 'normalised' prescriptions to be redeemed (Johnson 1998, p 210).

For Foucault, subjects are constituted by power – not by responsibility and autonomy. Subjects are constructed within discourses and disciplinary practices. Having said that, some similarities exist between neo-Marxism and Foucauldianism, as well as some important differences.¹⁹⁰ Both Althusser and Foucault are anti-humanists. While Althusser distinguished between ideology and science he retained a place for ideology, whereas Foucault rejects theories of ideology because “they always stand in a secondary relation to some prior determining material realm” (McNay 1992, p 25). He takes a stronger anti-humanist position – ideas are not located in subjects (Man) but in the mechanisms of the human sciences – he is interested in the effects of truth and power as productive not repressive. Power is necessary for the production of knowledge and is inherent in all social relationships (Grosz 1990b, p 83-84). Foucault stresses the local and specific, not the global/universal ‘totalising discourses’. For Foucault, where there is power there is resistance, although, unlike Marx, Foucault does not offer grounds for resistance or encourage resistance: “no discourse is inherently liberating or oppressive” (Sawicki 1991, p 54). Many left-wing intellectuals and Marxists, like Nicos Poulantzas, who were sympathetic to Foucault, criticised Foucault for not detailing how resistance works (Poulantzas 1974). In addition, many feminists were critical of Foucault for his disregard of women, although some did engage in feminist criticism through his understanding of the Power/knowledge nexus and critiques of governmentality.¹⁹¹ For Judith Butler, the subject can engage in “resignification, redeployment, subversive citation from within, and interruption and inadvertent convergence with other [power/discourse] networks. ‘Agency’ is to be found precisely at such junctures where discourse is renewed” (Butler 1995, p 135).

¹⁹⁰ Marxist feminists, like Michèle Barrett, turned to the work of Foucault, especially concepts like ‘discourse’ and ‘regimes of power/knowledge/truth’, while retaining some of their beliefs in Marxism – what Barrett, for example, referred to as ‘post-Marxism’ (Barrett 1992).

¹⁹¹ For an early example of the use of Foucault's work, see Game and Pringle (1986).

While Foucault might have been the first point of contact with poststructuralism, for some feminists, it was not long before they engaged with the work of French feminists like Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva among others. Elizabeth Grosz favoured the work of Irigaray, and it was through her text *Sexual Subversions* that French feminism was introduced to many in Australia (Grosz 1989).¹⁹² Psychoanalysis also gained dominance in feminist poststructuralist work, especially in the work of Luce Irigaray.

Psychoanalysis as an Important Precursor to Deconstruction

Jacques Lacan and Psychoanalysis

In the early 1970s radical feminists, like Kate Millet, were very critical of Freudian psychoanalysis (Millet 1970). Juliet Mitchell's book *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* put psychoanalysis back on the agenda for many feminists (Mitchell 1974). Elizabeth Grosz was important in introducing Lacan to Australian audiences (Grosz 1990c). Of particular interest was Jacques Lacan's restructuring of Freud's biological explanation of women's sexual development as lack, with "a socio-historical analysis of the transmission of meanings and values across generations" (Grosz 1990c, p 78). In other words, identity is formed in relation to "specific social and historical contexts" and therefore is not natural or inevitable (Gatens 1991, p 100). Also important for feminism is Lacan's emphasis on language as a way for the subject to enter the symbolic order of culture (outside of the symbolic order is insanity). Lacan applied structuralist linguistics to understand the unconscious. For Lacan, "the unconscious is structured like a language for it is governed by two poles of linguistic functioning, metaphor/condensation and metonymy/displacement" (Grosz 1990c, p 4). Thus language is important in the construction of gendered subjects, especially if this language perpetuates inequality. Barbara Johnson, a feminist deconstructive critic, argued that "the question of gender is a question of language" (Johnson 1987, p 37). Lacan's account of the symbolic order evolved around 'lack' and 'desire'.

¹⁹² On the other hand, Toril Moi, who discussed the work of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, favoured Kristeva; her *Textual/Sexual Politics* (1985) was also an influential text and was used widely in Women's Studies courses in Australia.

Desire is a fundamental lack, a hole in being that can be satisfied only by one 'thing' – another('s) desire. Each self-conscious subject desires the desire of the other as its object. Its desire is to be desired by the other, its counterpart (Grosz 1990c, p 64).

In his account of male development Lacan claims that the boy (son) cannot become part of the symbolic order unless he takes on the 'name of the father' (for fear of castration) by ceasing to desire the mother (or wanting to be the phallus for the mother). While the son can never have the phallus (it is lost through the acquisition of language) the son will be rewarded later by entering the symbolic order, which rewards masculine qualities, and by gaining a wife substitute. For women, or daughters, because they do not, or cannot, possess the phallus (no castration issues), they reject the mother and side with the father but in a subordinate and submissive role; they have a double lack (lack the phallus and lack the penis). Women are not independent subjects in Lacan's account: "they do not enter the Symbolic realm of language and culture as subjects capable of speaking their desire. Rather, women become the objects of a (fore-doomed) masculine desire" (Gatens 1991, p 117). Thus, women become the object of desire, the phallus.

The problem with Lacan's construction of the symbolic order is that it is patriarchal in nature:

The symbolic's patriarchal nature relies in part on the coincident meeting of two intervening 'third terms': language, and the structural position of the third party, currently occupied by a man. The man occupies this position in an arrangement where women take primary care of children. But he also occupies it in a social context where men are valorised. Generally, Lacanians insist that the symbolic is patriarchal because the woman is the primary care-giver, the man the intervening third party, occupying the position co-incident with language. Whether this coincidence could be separated, whether there would still be a symbolic if it were, is debated (Brennan 1989, p 3).

In other words, for Brennan, the "problem is that Lacan's symbolic makes patriarchy seem inevitable" (Brennan 1989, p 3). Moreover, the patriarchal nature of the symbolic order is closely tied to the notion of the phallus. The phallus is a signifier of logos, of language and ultimately one's position as a masculine male or a feminine female in the symbolic order, but "by its presence or absence, the penis becomes the defining characteristic of both sexes" (Grosz 1990c, p 116). Thus, women are incomplete, are already castrated and their bodies are a mark of lack because Lacan's symbolic phallus "produces the penis as an object of signification, rather than a biological organ" (Grosz 1990c, p 117).

While some feminists still have problems with psychoanalysis, many accept that Lacan offers feminists another way of understanding the exclusion or repression of the feminine in the symbolic order and within realms of power, except as phallic women (Tong 1989, p 220-221). This insight leads to understanding the need to abandon binary thinking and posit a feminine alterity – beyond masculine/feminine asymmetries. According to Drucilla Cornell:

[Lacan] provides the most compelling account of how the structures of conscious language are inherently, through a[n] unconscious erasure of the feminine from the symbolic order, inseparable from the erasure of the significance of the Mother. This erasure takes place through the erection of the phallus as the transcendental signifier, which cements meaning through the privileging of the masculine. The erection of the phallus as the transcendental signifier gives operational cultural force to the fantasy that to have a penis is to have the phallus, with all its supposed magical qualities of creation and potency. The fantasy that the phallus is the only symbol of re-generation lies at the basis of patrilineal lineage and of patriarchy (Cornell 1995, p 150).

Psychoanalysis, and in particular Lacan's reading of Freud, opened up new directions for feminist theory. Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva make the most important contributions to a re-thinking and re-imagining of the symbolic order. In regard to deconstruction in Australia the work of Luce Irigaray has been the most influential. What follows is a brief description of Irigaray's engagement with psychoanalysis and deconstruction.

Luce Irigaray and Psychoanalysis

Luce Irigaray's work challenges psychoanalysis in two ways. First she exposes patriarchy, especially its dependence on the feminine, and second she offers a positive symbolic representation of the feminine. She uses a deconstructive technique to develop a philosophy based on plurality and fluidity rather than lack in the Freudian sense (Irigaray 1985a, p 90). Principally, Irigaray challenges psychoanalytic representations of female sexuality. For instance she states:

Female sexuality has always been theorized within masculine parameters. ... According to these theorists, woman's erogenous zones are no more than a clitoris-sex, which cannot stand up in comparison with the valued phallic organ; or a hole-envelope ... a nonsex organ or a masculine sex organ turned inside out in order to caress itself (Irigaray 1980, p 99).

Following on she claims that "woman and her pleasure are not mentioned in this conception of the sexual relationship" (Irigaray 1980, p 99).

A precondition for Irigaray's philosophy is to expose and end men's dominance over philosophy by challenging their power to define. Like Derrida, Irigaray maintains that Logos is phallogocentric. Irigaray sees the "logic, which has dominated the West since the Greeks" as concentrated on "this [phallic] kind of unity" (Irigaray 1980, p 101). Thus, she defines western culture as one that "claims to enumerate everything, cipher everything by units, inventory everything by individualities" (Irigaray 1980, p 101). Feminine specificity, which is plural and multiple, is unable to be understood or explained within this framework.

Carolyn Burke notes that "Irigaray questions the structures of logic in which the female as concept has been suppressed, then displaces the whole system" (Burke 1994, p 45). Moreover, her account of women's subordination challenges Lacan's construction of the symbolic order which does not account for man's violence against woman. For Irigaray:

The child's, and particularly the male child's, inability to acknowledge or repay the gift of his own birth, the gift of language, bodily existence, nurturance – the gift of body and all its capacities, including conceptual – that he owes to the maternal body is this unrepayable burden of obligation that is repressed and covered over through phallic privilege and *left unrepresented in patriarchal representational systems ...* as long as women, and especially mothers, continue to bear the weight of this structure of giving, the violence directed to women will continue. While the gift of life and body cannot be received as a gift, it is converted into a debt that cannot be repaid, that cannot be acknowledged; social, political, and cultural life bears the (violent) traces of this covering over of the gift in both the exclusion of women from active definition and direction over social, political and cultural life (accomplished through women's 'confinement' to the maternal and domestic function) and the violence of the denial of violence that marks civil society while rendering it unable to understand itself (Grosz 2005, p 70, my emphasis).

Instead Irigaray developed a philosophic stance for 'the feminine' which is plural, fluid and poetic.

While the work of Irigaray is important, feminists who contested the socialist, liberal, and radical feminist categories still relied on male theorists (Lacan, Derrida, Foucault and so on), and this drew the ire of separatist feminists. While this critique came a lot earlier than 2000, Diprose's response to feminist criticism that poststructural feminists mainly draw on the work of male theorists encapsulates earlier arguments:

Drawing on male philosophers in thinking about feminist thinking does not amount to using the ideas of men to authorise the thinking of women. At the risk of stating the obvious the field of the other that generates feminist thinking is dominated by men. Insofar as some of these men and their ideas challenge the ideas of reason and autonomy that sustain their domination, they may provoke thoughts about thinking that would welcome feminist philosophy. But they will be equally provocative and disturbing for what they leave out, presenting a strangeness within which new lines of thought will open. It is in this spirit of thinking that I engage with some thoughts of men, as well as those of women, in offering ideas about feminist philosophy (Diprose 2000, p 117).

The above account demonstrates that Foucault's work was important as an introduction to poststructuralist approaches to philosophy and in the social sciences, especially in regard to power relations and subject formation. However, while Foucault focuses on the body as a site for power and resistance, he does not distinguish between male and female bodies (Grosz 1990, p 91-92). Foucault's work is blind to female subjectivity and the way female bodies are "culturally inscribed" (Grosz 1990, p 103). Thus, he does not engage with "the interests of feminist theory and politics" in the way that Irigaray does (Grosz 1990, p 104).

For poststructural feminist philosophers like Morris,¹⁹³ Grosz, Gatens and Kirby, there was no going back to a humanist construction of the subject. As Kirby states, "the subject of feminist emancipationist rhetoric is the same unified subject who uses masculinist dualisms that devalue 'the feminine'" (Kirby 1994, p 127). In the language of Irigaray, the sameness/difference argument represents women as both A and B or as A and not-A, rather than offering a new positive model for representing sexual difference. To move away from a 'cycle of sameness' poststructuralist feminists, including some Australian feminists, attempt to develop theories that are inclusive of difference at a fundamental level: philosophies that move beyond phallogocentrism (Grosz 1990b, p 110).

First Glimpses of Poststructuralism in Australian Texts

Australian feminist circles are small – 'movements' travel quickly through conferences, core curriculum texts in Women's Studies programs, debates in journals, open university/distance education programs, overseas visitors, and

¹⁹³ Meaghan Morris was one of the earliest Australian translators of Foucault. Indeed, according to Felski and Sofia she was mostly known in Australian feminist circles as 'a translator of Foucault' (Felski and Sofia 1996, p 385).

Australian PhD study abroad¹⁹⁴ – the exchanges between these threads are fluid. Moreover, Australia is positioned at the intersection of international debates with access to US, Canadian, UK and European ideas (Sheridan 1988, p 1). Thus, it is possible to trace the emergence of new ideas in a number of ways. Hence, what follows is a brief look at early feminist texts as a way of mapping the emergence of deconstruction in academic feminism. Some of these important texts came out of conferences in Australia.¹⁹⁵ While it is important to mention these contributions, this chapter will focus on texts that were designed as course material, that is, textbooks. The rationale for this focus is that textbooks reflect the academic landscape of the times, whereas conference proceedings are specialised and selective. To facilitate

¹⁹⁴ Postdoctoral fellowships and graduate scholarships enabled study in France under the supervision/tutelage of Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva.

¹⁹⁵ Examples include *Nellie Melba, Ginger Meggs and Friends* (First Association for the Study of Australian Literature, ASAL Conference held at Monash University in 1978) (Dermody et al. 1982). *Nellie Melba, Ginger Meggs and Friends* is one of the first collections of postmodern critiques of Australian culture. It demonstrates the crossroads available to Australian academics working in cultural studies. There is a very strong socialist influence in this text. Australian academics review the meaning of culture according to the British cultural tradition (Raymond Williams and F. R. Leavis). The work of Althusser and Stuart Hall influences some of the contributions. In addition, but to a lesser degree, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes and the British Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies also make their presence felt; however, two thirds of the contributions take new directions. Many of the contributors taught in the college system and Institutes of Technology in Australia rather than in the University sector, for example deconstructive feminists like Kay Iseman (Schaffer) and Lesley Stern.

The Foreign Body Papers was based on The Foreign Bodies Conference Semiotics in/and Australia held in Sydney in February 1981 (Botsman et al. 1981). For some critics this collection marked the “institutionalisation of French theory within the Australian academy” (Lewis 2003, p 198). The editors claim that the aim of *The Foreign Bodies Papers* is to introduce Australian readers to ideas “not widely recognised in Australia” (Botsman et al. 1981, p 7). The focus of the text is on semiotics and includes references to Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guattari, and Barthes. The text is not particularly feminist although it does include Morris and Freadman’s “Import Rhetoric: ‘Semiotics in/and Australia’” (Morris and Freadman 1981). The publisher, Local Consumption, was the Sydney press that published some of the new work in cultural studies, including Irigaray. Australian feminists were introduced to deconstruction via Irigaray in the mid 1980s.

Not the Whole Story (1984) edited by Sneja Gunew and Ian Reid was the result of selective proceedings from the ‘Narrative’ Conference held at Deakin University in 1982. The conference was held under the auspices of the Australian and South Pacific Association for Comparative Literary Studies. This text is important because it is a collection of papers which are experimental within their fields, but also because of the way in which the editors assume the audience is already familiar with the language and project of poststructuralism. This is evident in the introduction to this collection where there is no explanation or introduction of terms, which are by no means commonplace in Australia in 1982. Reference is made to Derridean deconstruction, Freudian and Lacanian Psychoanalysis, Kristevan semiotics among others. However, the text also displays some anxiety or tensions about the shift in theoretical direction. Feminist contributors influenced by deconstruction include Sneja Gunew, Kay Iseman (Schaffer) and Anna Gibbs.

The Futur*Fall: Excursions into Postmodernity Conference was held in July 1984 at the University of Sydney. Conference proceedings were published in 1986, including work by Elizabeth Gross (Grosz) and Terry Threadgold. Two very important keynote speakers were present: Jean Baudrillard and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

this discussion, five texts have been chosen for close analysis:¹⁹⁶ *Australian Women: Feminist Perspectives* (1981) edited by Norma Grieve and Patricia Grimshaw; *Australian Women: New Feminist Perspectives* edited by Norma Grieve and Alicia Burns (1986); *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought* edited by Norma Grieve and Alicia Burns (1994); *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct* edited by Sneja Gunew (1990b); and *Contemporary Australian Feminism 2* edited by Kate Pritchard Hughes (1997). Readings will be confined to a brief summary and a comment on the way in which the text engages with deconstruction, or in its absence, poststructuralism.

The first of the three *Australian Women* texts was titled *Australian Women: Feminist Perspectives*, and was published by Norma Grieve and Patricia Grimshaw in 1981. It contained three sections and 21 chapters. The first section was titled “The Origins of Women’s Subordination” (Grieve and Grimshaw 1981, p 1-66). This section mainly drew on Marxist and Radical Feminist perspectives with some psychoanalysis (mainly Freud). This section covers a range of topics including women’s subordination in history, literature, religion, psyche, economics and biology.

The second section, “Forms and Expressions of Patriarchal Power” has four parts: “Aboriginal Society”; “The World Of Literature”; “Familiar Roles And Ideologies Of The Past”; and “In Contemporary Society” (Grieve and Grimshaw 1981, p 69-212). Annette Hamilton’s chapter has an anthropological focus, and begins with a quote from Foucault (Hamilton 1981, p 69). In a footnote she underlines the Foucauldian understanding of ‘power’ (Hamilton 1981, p 280). However no other mention is made of Foucault. Most pieces refer to British literary theorists, radical feminism and sociological theories.

Section three, “Feminist Analysis of Subordination” has four parts: “theory, experience”, “schooling and sex-role stereotyping”; and ends with a model for the future – androgyny (Grieve and Grimshaw 1981, p 215-257). This section draws on a mixture of Marxist and radical feminist theories. Thus, the only reference to

¹⁹⁶ While there are many more texts that could have been included, these five form a ‘theoretical sample’, selected because they were written to appeal to the university market, and because they show a progression in theoretical complexity.

poststructural theories in the 1981 version of *Australian Women* is a footnote to Foucault's notion of power.

Norma Grieve and Ailsa Burns edited the second *Australian Women* in 1986, this time with a different sub-title: *Australian Women: New Feminist Perspectives*. The introduction to *Australian Women* begins by referring to both Millett and Firestone in the opening sentence, and by the end of the page there is a quote from Juliet Mitchell (Grieve and Burns 1986). The direction taken by these theorists generally informs most of the work in this text. Worthy of mention is Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle's groundbreaking critical sociological work on secretaries (Game and Pringle 1986), which uses a revised Marxist/socialist framework, but also weaves in a Foucauldian and Freudian analysis. This work shows an awareness of a Foucauldian and Freudian understanding of 'subjects', rather than 'individuals' who are autonomous and self-knowing. Another interesting difference is that the final chapter in *Australian Women* on 'Theorizing Gender' is by Robert Connell (Connell 1986). Connell is a sociologist who is best known for his work on 'masculinities'.¹⁹⁷ Like other 'scientific Marxists' he was, at this stage of his career, suspicious of French feminism and psychoanalysis. While there is little evidence of Derridean deconstruction in this text, there is some reference to Foucault on sexuality and Foucault on power.

Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct edited by Sneja Gunew in 1990 broke new ground, it revolutionized Women's Studies in Australia, as it was the most influential text in regard to the spread of poststructural theories. It was developed in the mid 1980s as a core text for the distance or external courses in Women's Studies taught at Deakin, University of Queensland and Murdoch Universities. The original material appeared in two volumes, one contained primary source material. *Feminist Knowledge* is divided into four parts, with eleven chapters. The first part is titled 'Feminist Knowledge'. This section has two parts, the first is written by Sneja Gunew, and the second by Susan Sheridan (Gunew 1990b; Sheridan 1990). Gunew interrogates the "relationship between knowing, or, meaning production, knowledge, and theory" in formal education (Gunew 1990b, p 13). She then goes on to consider

¹⁹⁷ Robert Connell is now known as Raewyn Connell.

the relationship between knowledge and political change after the impact of feminism (Gunew 1990b, p 13). Sheridan also looks at the production of knowledge but her focus is on feminist knowledge both within and outside of the academy (Women's Studies and Women's Liberation Movement) (Sheridan 1990, p 36). The second section titled, 'Contemporary Theories of Power and Subjectivity' also has two parts. The first is written by Elizabeth Grosz and is titled 'Contemporary Theories of Power and Subjectivity' and the second, by Philipa Rothfield, is titled 'Feminism, Subjectivity, and Sexual Difference' (Grosz 1990b; Rothfield 1990). In this chapter Grosz identifies four theories of subjectivity and power developed by men (Althusser, Lacan, Foucault and Derrida) and then identifies ways in which feminists have adapted these theories to address feminist issues (Grosz 1990b, p 61). Rothfield also looks at theories of subjectivity but in relation to sexual difference and the WLM (Rothfield 1990, p 121).

The third section is titled 'Discourses of Definition'. This section has four parts, 'Philosophy' by Grosz, 'Psychoanalysis and Feminism' by Hazel Rowley and Elizabeth Grosz, 'The Definition of Male and Female: Biological Reductionism and the Sanctions of Normality' by Gisela Kaplan and Lesley Rogers, and 'Religion' by Marie Tulip (Grosz 1990d; Kaplan and Rogers 1990; Rowley and Grosz 1990; Tulip 1990). This section looks at feminism in relation to a number of other fields of knowledge: Grosz looks at the relationship between feminism and philosophy; Rowley and Grosz looks at the relationship between feminism and psychoanalysis; Tulip looks at feminism and religion; and Kaplan and Rogers discuss the relationship between feminism and biological reductionism. The last section titled 'Feminist Interventions' has three parts: 'Radical Feminism: Critique and Construct' by Robyn Rowland and Renate Klein; 'Socialist Feminism' by Louise Johnson; and 'Conclusion: A Note on Essentialism and Difference' by Grosz (Grosz 1990a; Johnson 1990; Rowland and Klein 1990). Rowland and Klein define key concepts within radical feminist theory, and also offer a politics of resistance. Likewise, Johnson defines Marxist feminism as a way of explaining feminist interventions and the emergence of socialist feminism. The philosophical position taken in the Rowland and Klein chapter is at odds with most of the other contributions. This points to signs of conflict within feminism, but it is also important to note that they

are recorded in this text. By way of conclusion, Grosz explores the essentialism and difference debates in order to “raise the question of the dual commitments of feminist theory and the need to devise appropriate criteria for its assessment” (Grosz 1990a, p 333). As stated in the previous chapter tensions between poststructuralist feminists and radical feminists were evident in the construction of the course that resulted in this book.

The third *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought* was published in 1994 and is edited by Norma Grieve and Ailsa Burns (Grieve and Burns 1994). This text has three parts: ‘The Context of Australian Feminism’; ‘Producing Feminist Theory: Difference and Complexity’; and ‘Contesting Male Power’. This text is very diverse: it refers to socialist feminism, radical feminism and poststructural feminism. Derrida, Foucault and Irigaray appear in the index. A particularly striking chapter, which makes use of deconstruction, is ‘Viral Identities: Feminism and Postmodernism’ by Vicki Kirby (Kirby 1994). Kirby uses the work of Derrida and Foucault, among others, to engage in the debate about the meaning of postmodernism and how it relates to feminism. Tensions between competing feminist theories are evident in this text.

Katherine P. Hughes edited *Contemporary Australian Feminism 2* in 1997. According to Renate Klein this text was designed to do several things, including bridge the gap between older and younger feminists, contribute to international feminist scholarship, and act as a textbook for university students (Klein 1997, p v-vi). The chapters are very different from each other as they cover a range of areas and use a variety of theoretical approaches. This text deals with a number of issues raised by feminism, such as identity, sexuality and ethnicity. Moreover, the text looks at institutions like the family, law and health in relation to women’s issues. Some chapters are strongly influenced by poststructuralist theory, most notably Kwok Wei Leng’s chapter on sexuality (Kwok Wei Leng 1997).¹⁹⁸ Kwok Wei Leng traces the debates between feminists about the meaning of sex and sexuality, otherwise known as the ‘sex wars’ (Kwok Wei Leng 1997, p 77).

¹⁹⁸ See also Hughes (1997) for an interesting introduction to feminism.

The reading of these texts points to some divisions within feminism, which were also raised in the previous chapter. Reference to Foucault appears in all six texts, while reference to Derrida is only evident in the two most recent texts (*Feminist Knowledge* and *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought*). Moreover, in the earlier two *Australian Women* Indigenous issues are taken up but do not appear in the other texts where multiculturalism is introduced. *Feminist Knowledge* stands out as a critical text in the dissemination of poststructuralism in Australia. The synopsis above indicates that Foucault's ideas were more likely to be introduced to feminist students some years before Derrida's. The content of most of these texts suggest that some feminists were keen to introduce poststructuralist theories, however selective, to student audiences.

The above synopsis of textbook content demonstrated that Australian feminists were by the late 1980s engaging with poststructuralism, the following section will look specifically at their engagement with French feminism.

Exchange Between French and Australian Feminisms

In 1979 Meaghan Morris noted that an exchange of ideas was becoming possible between French and English speaking feminists (Morris 1979, p 63). This was due to the translation of some French feminist texts by American and Australian feminists. One of the first significant translations was a collection of 'French Feminist' essays, *New French Feminisms*, published in the USA in 1980 by Elaine Marks and Isobelle de Courtivron (Marks and de Courtivron 1980). This text was translated and introduced through an American feminist framework, which was "characterized by the insistence that women are equal, and its concern with the real world" (Brennan 1989, p 2). Nevertheless, it must be noted that there were divisions within US feminism regarding the use and interpretation of French feminism.¹⁹⁹ For many reasons, some of which are explored below, this text had mixed reviews.

Many Australian feminists were critical of a French feminism that came via the United States. According to Australian feminist academic and author Anna Gibbs:

¹⁹⁹ See Carolyn Burke (1980) for a different perspective.

In a country which is too often simply the recipient of American cultural production, it is easy to overlook the specificity of our own feminist context. Moreover, the number of translations of French feminist work circulating here is extremely limited, and once again we are receiving word from France via the United States. The question of the value, and of the dangers, of such cultural trade has yet to be considered by feminists in all its complexity (Gibbs et al. 1980, p 24).

Some Australian feminists were suspicious of the way in which American feminists presented French feminism. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, feminists like Meaghan Morris and Rosi Braidotti were critical of the simplistic representation by US translators of the status of French feminism in France, as well as its singular translation in the US and adaptation to US feminisms. Important differences are reduced in *New French Feminisms* in order to create a palatable, simplistic version of ‘feminism in France’ for American feminists; what Huston refers to as “a neat package deal” (Huston 1980, p 44). According to Lewis, feminists in the US and Britain understood deconstruction differently depending on the way it was integrated into the university sector:

The standard narrativization of the transnational migration of ‘French theory’ is that it was absorbed into English departments in the United States and transformed into a fairly depoliticised form of literary deconstruction, while in the United Kingdom – where it was imported via the New Left and in particular *New Left Review* – it became linked to a Marxist project (Lewis 2003, p 193).

Australian feminists, whilst acknowledging US, Canadian, and British trends, came to their own conclusions regarding the uses of deconstruction. Nonetheless, misunderstandings occurred because of differences in American and French feminist agendas. In other words, when US feminists translated Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva, they understood the ambivalences and playful nuances through their own (and some would say limited) interpretative frameworks, which they passed on within the publication. Also some US feminists accused French feminists of essentialism (a misreading). Morris, critical of the way in which differences between US and French feminisms are represented and the subsequent impact of these simplistic representations, states:

If feminist literary criticism [in France] has been conspicuous by its absence, women like H el ene Cixous, Catherine Cl ement, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Suzanne Allen, Xavi ere Gauthier, Madelaine Gagnon, and Nicole Brossard have been intensely involved in the critique of philosophy and psychoanalysis; and a great deal of work has appeared on women’s social and economic conditions, on the media, on politics and sexuality (Morris 1979, p 63).

American feminist objectives, on the other hand, are described as a “building of a practice” (Morris 1979, p 63). Thus, Morris claims that French feminism was

associated with a critical engagement with philosophy and American feminism with the establishment of Women's Studies' courses, and a literary critique. Braidotti and Weinstock also claim that this narrow way of distinguishing between English speaking and French speaking feminism is "directly proportional to the American feminists' sense of their own theoretical inadequacy" (Braidotti and Weinstock 1980, p 25). Braidotti and Weinstock go on to say:

The result is an unproblematic reflection. Instead of making an effective meeting point between two distinct and yet interrelated phenomena – French and American feminism – this structure simply creates a relationship of reciprocal dependence. The U.S. has the material means; France has the ideas and theoretical sophistication – the perfect couple (Braidotti and Weinstock 1980, p 25).

Morris and Braidotti and Weinstock claim that American and French feminisms were not as unknown to each other as some would suggest. There was a strong connection between Derrida and French Studies in Yale. In the main, French philosophical theory in the US was filtered through Comparative Literature Departments. Derrida was teaching at Yale (Yale French Studies) with Geoffrey Hartman, Harold Bloom, and J. Hillis Miller. Also associated with this school was Paul de Man (Wolfreys 1998, p 1-18). However, this connection was not always recognized, perhaps because of the absence of significant feminist input.²⁰⁰

In the early 1980s, a number of young Australian feminist scholars, including Rosi Braidotti,²⁰¹ Anna Gibbs,²⁰² and Meaghan Morris, travelled to France to study with

²⁰⁰ There was also a growing anti-American sentiment in Australia because of the Vietnam war, see Summers (1999, p 229-234).

²⁰¹ Rosi Braidotti went to Paris in 1978, as a PhD student from ANU – she completed her PhD at the Sorbonne University where she came into contact with Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir (Braidotti 1986, p 9).

²⁰² Anna Gibbs was in Paris in 1979-80 where she studied with Hélène Cixous. Giving a sense of the international links which were made while abroad, Anna Gibbs discusses her experience:

Meaghan [Morris] introduced me to Rosi Braidotti, who was in Paris when I was, and who went there from ANU, although she's never come back here to live. Rosi and I set up a study group over there with Alice Jardine, whom I had met in New York on my way to Paris, and Alice introduced us all to Jane Weinstock, the filmmaker. Later Nancy Huston (Canadian novelist) joined our group. I met Mia Campioni in Paris (can't remember who told her to contact me) and took her to Cixous' seminar, and Mia told me to contact Liz [Grosz] when I got back to Oz - which I did, so that was when I met her for the first time (Anna Gibbs, pers. comm., 29 September, 2005).

leading French intellectuals, including Irigaray, Kristeva, Foucault and Derrida.²⁰³ Kirby contends that “many young Australian intellectuals made the almost obligatory journey abroad during the 1970s and returned to translate a number of foreign texts into local usefulness” (Kirby 1994, p 131). Thus, most of the criticism of US feminist translations came from Australian feminists who could read and translate French texts. Nevertheless, there were few Australian translations of French feminist texts in the 1980s. Shifting ideas around complex concepts such as subjectivity, neo-Lacanian critiques, notions of the real-imaginary symbolic and the introduction of many new terms, like *differánce* and *jouissance*, led to confusion for some feminists, and for some this confusion manifested itself in resentment.

Unique Australian Feminism

Australian academic feminism is not a replica of British, American or French feminisms; rather it has a unique character of its own. Australian feminists have incorporated many different theoretical perspectives into what is a uniquely Australian style. According to Susan Sheridan, countries like Australia, New Zealand and Canada are not isolated “colonial outpost[s] but positioned at the crossroad” of intellectual and political thought (Sheridan 1988, p 1). This feature acts as an advantage, as feminist theory can borrow from a large pool of thought, rather than work in the constraints of an embedded intellectual tradition. Thus, Australian feminism is receptive to ideas from the United States of America (USA), Canada, and British feminist influences, while also being affected by French feminisms.²⁰⁴ Sheridan claims:

Australian feminism, having always provided fertile ground for the transplantation of ‘international’ (US and UK, and latterly French) feminisms, has certain indigenous features, notable among them being its capacity to graft those others on to its own growth and at times to produce new species (Sheridan 1988, p 1).

²⁰³ Australian feminists also went to the US, for instance, Vicki Kirby and Zoe Sofoulis studied at the University of California at Santa Cruz. They were involved in the “history of consciousness program and its US variation of French theory” (Henderson 1998, p 2). American feminists also came to Australia, for example Kay Schaffer, who completed a PhD in Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, was appointed to Salisbury SACAE in 1975. She was specifically recruited to develop and teach a Core Critical Theory course that included Continental Philosophy, phenomenology, Foucault, Lacan and, later, French feminism and deconstruction (Kay Schaffer, pers. comm., 22 August 2006).

²⁰⁴ However, the inclusions of some theoretical paradigms prove to be more problematic than others, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter.

Australian feminism is both highly theorised and strongly political and it could be argued that these two areas often operate on parallel lines. The content or subject matter of feminism from the late 1970s to the early 1980s is a product of the blossoming of ideas that came from an array of sources. Some feminists, like Battersby, suggest that feminists in Australia have a unique perspective because of the nature of Australia's settlement (Battersby 2000, p 2). Issues around colonialism, nationalism, race relations with Aboriginal Australians as well as with migrant (non-Anglo) populations have directed feminist debates in a unique way. This argument is borne out by the review of Women's Studies textbooks above, which reveals the complexity of Australian feminist interests.

For others, like Pauline Johnson, Australian feminism's uniqueness in the academy lies in its anti-humanist utopian outlook:²⁰⁵

Eschewing a liberal feminism, preoccupied with the achievement of a mere equality with men, Australian feminist theory has consistently looked to feminism as the birthplace of new alternative futures for women, futures that might encompass radically new understandings of the meaning of being a woman in the modern world (Johnson 1998, p 206).

Australian feminists read French theory through a "New Left, ... sexual and libertarian politics [which] ... dominated Australian leftist intellectual culture in the late 1960s and through to the 1970s" (Lewis 2003, p 193). So, while feminists in Australia incorporated theoretical perspectives developed overseas they did not simply reproduce these theories, rather they transformed them into what is uniquely Australian: a transformation that shows respect for the other; the other who has given thought to the same issues.

Deconstruction came to Australian feminism more through the teaching of feminist philosophy than directly through Derrida's texts. Irigaray was translated in *Foreign Bodies Papers* in 1981, which stimulated an interest in Continental philosophy. This was because Irigaray was saying something radically different to feminists (challenging philosophical premises that were previously unchallenged). She was asking whether there is an essential category called woman. In other words, when we say 'woman' what do we mean? While some feminists wanted (want) to hang on

²⁰⁵ Juliet Mitchell was one of first to bring together anti-humanism and feminism (Rothfield 1990, p 141).

to the category of woman, as an oppressed minority, so that a women's movement is mobilized, others are looking for other ways of representing the feminine. Morris, Grosz and Gatens turned to poststructuralist theories because they saw that 'the feminine' would never get beyond the impasse of being the other of 'the masculine'. The best that can be done with 'modernist' theories is to adapt masculine characteristics without advancing anything that might be called 'the feminine' outside of masculine parameters. Deconstruction offers feminism the gift of death – to realise itself, give itself up to death (total transformation). This is risky because what follows is not known, must necessarily be not known; that is the mystery of the gift.

New Australian Feminism

In 1988 Michèle Barrett spoke of 'New Australian Feminism' to describe the work of Elizabeth Grosz and Moira Gatens. What Barrett identified as unique is Grosz' and Gatens' distinctive reading of Lacanian psychoanalysis in conjunction with the linguistic work of Roland Barthes. There are many problems associated with labelling. As Battersby points out, problems arise from reductive readings of Grosz' and Gatens' extensive work, but also for Australian feminism in general (Battersby 2000, p 2-4). For instance, Jill Matthews claims that the cost of defining Australian feminisms in such a narrow way implies that "what the rest of us do and think is thereby relegated to mere parochial rattling of the bars" (Matthews 1996, p 54). What can be said is that both Elizabeth Grosz' and Moira Gatens' work has led the way in the development of feminist theory, both nationally and internationally. Grosz was also influential in translating French feminist theory through a psychoanalytic lens, thus making it available and relevant to Australian audiences. Indeed, there is an argument to be made that Grosz, in particular, has been instrumental, not only in the promulgation of deconstruction, but also in regard to the type of deconstruction practised in Australia.

While acknowledging that labels are problematic, an important aspect of the 'New Australian Feminism', and an aspect wherein deconstruction has played a major role, is theories of embodiment. A number of prominent feminist scholars including Grosz, Gatens, Diprose and Kirby were conducting research in or around 'theories of

embodiment'.²⁰⁶ Feminism has a history of strong anti-essentialism dating back to de Beauvoir. There is a suspicion among some feminist philosophers about theories that look to feminine embodiment for a theory of feminine subjectivity.²⁰⁷ Poststructural and postmodern theories offered feminists a way to avoid the traps of essentialism. According to Johnson:

Influenced, in different degrees and to different effects, by the deconstructivist model of the role and the limits of theory, French feminism suggested to its Australian audience a way in which an anti-humanism might yield a gratifying utopianism without falling into an essentialist construction of sexual difference (Johnson 1998, p 212).

Grosz, in particular, has contributed to a unique understanding of embodiment. According to Penelope Deutscher, the risk of essentialism was overcome by “the reconceptualisation of embodiment as the site of historical, social, and political meaning” (Deutscher 1998, p 11). In this way biological essentialism (reduction of woman to a feminine body which is deemed inferior) and biologism (women’s essence defined by biological capacities) were avoided. The body became another discourse to be deconstructed: “the task of deconstruction encouraged the theorist to look to discourse as the site of a continuing drama into which they might intervene as critical onlooker” (Johnson 1998, p 212).

Australian feminists who looked to a radically different way of representing the ‘wholly other’, quite outside the reformist project of equality feminism, saw deconstruction as a possible avenue. Theories of subjectivity were also developed using deconstruction as a tool. Australian feminists were working towards a deconstruction that aims to develop a feminist praxis, not simply to produce a ‘new truth’ about how to represent the feminine. Deconstruction offers feminism the anticipation of risk, of the *perhaps*.

Debates in these areas have now moved beyond the naïve assumptions about categories like the self and selfhood, categories of masculinity, sexuality, and queer

²⁰⁶ See, for instance, Grosz (1994), Gatens (1996), and Kirby (1997).

²⁰⁷ These sentiments were boosted by the publication of a number of significant feminist texts, including Genevieve Lloyd’s, *The Man of Reason* in 1984; Carole Pateman’s *The Sexual Contract* in 1988; Elizabeth Grosz’ *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* in 1989; Meaghan Morris’ *The Pirate’s Fiancee: Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism* in 1988; *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct*, edited by Sneja Gunew in 1990; and Rosi Braidotti’s *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy* in 1991.

studies (lesbians and gays and identity constructions). Deconstruction and French influenced theories are no longer ignored, as they have become a part of the broader discussion in the area of identity and subjectivity.

Reaction against Poststructuralism

By the mid 1980s a number of feminists held some scepticism about the effectiveness of reform strategies as a way to change the status quo for women. Susan Magarey states: "I should like to embark on research to discover how likely it is that the thousand minor reforms in which we are engaged will really bring about a total transformation in our whole society" (Magarey 1986, p 202). Within a reform framework, feminist agendas were viewed as luxuries, or accessories, which can be tolerated in times of wealth or affluence, but must be curtailed in times of hardship. While feminism is enmeshed with modernist aspirations of progress and emancipation, Kirby claims that:

Feminism can also be explained as a movement whose very struggles testify to modernism's routine betrayal of such hopes. The ability of patriarchal power to balance its concessions with recuperative inventiveness is sad evidence of the bitter-sweet nature of many feminist achievements (Kirby 1994, p 123).²⁰⁸

By 2000, many reforms made by feminists failed or were under threat due to government cutbacks by the Howard Liberal Government (neo-conservative). According to Bulbeck:

Feminism appears to be losing flavour in the wake of economic rationalism, globalisation and individualism, indicated by withdrawn budget support to women's organisations, childcare, legal aid and so on (Bulbeck 2001, p 27).

Thus, by working exclusively within a reform agenda, feminists repeatedly fought for the same wins in a system that does not recognize difference. Part of the problem, and where energy lags, is that the hegemonic views – which feminists are trying to reform – are in the main, fundamentally, or inherently, misogynist. Consequently, feminists are trapped in a policing role in order to ensure that previously gained concessions are not eroded. In other words, defending or trying to protect political gains becomes an imperative for feminism, whereby feminist energy is dissipated in a constant cycle of repetition. This was evidenced in Britain during

²⁰⁸ See J Curthoys (1997) and Faludi (1991) for an account of feminists' dissatisfaction with feminism's achievements.

the Thatcher years. Indeed, according to Angela McRobbie, the hostility towards postmodernism in Britain can be traced to “the Thatcher years where there were such constraints that political and intellectual responses were inevitably defensive” (McRobbie 1994, p 115).²⁰⁹ On the contrary, deconstruction offers feminism a way to move outside of its ‘defensive’ mode in which its theories do not enable a radicalisation of feminist politics.²¹⁰

Theory/Practice Debate

Earlier in this chapter reference was made to an early and ongoing conflict between Women’s Studies and the Women’s Liberation Movement and the role played by theory. It is important to note that resistance to deconstruction in Australia was also evident in the theory/practice debates, to the question concerning the role of theory in feminism. Although there was a shift towards the post–discourses as identified by Bulbeck (2001), there was also a complicating resistance. Resistance in the form of critique can be useful in the formation and refinement of developing theories. However, some resistance was the result of entrenched dogmatic definitions of what constitutes ‘feminism’. The emergence of deconstruction (along with other poststructuralist theories) has not only revitalised the theory/practice debate, which dates back to the inception of feminism, but currently dominates it. The following commentary is not restricted to Australian feminism, as these debates affect feminists across the world. This section will briefly cover some of the issues raised in the theory/practice debates. Then, it will address these issues in relation to deconstruction.

Conflation of Post-discourses

As mentioned in Chapter One, the conflation of ‘post’ discourses is not very useful for feminism, nor does it help trace the conditions that led to deconstruction.

²⁰⁹ Elizabeth Wilson also notes that:

In the 1980s there also seemed, under the onslaught of neo-liberal economics, to be a turning away from active political engagement. Or perhaps it was rather that feminists (this was certainly my experience) got caught up, inevitably and necessarily, in a defensive politics, trying to hold back the tide of rightwing legislation and attacks on workers, trades unions and minorities, and on the postwar welfare state (Wilson 2004, p 214).

²¹⁰ However, deconstruction cannot offer feminism a way of moving beyond this impasse if feminists do not engage with it.

However, it is important to note the connection between postmodernism, poststructuralism and neo-Marxism as comparisons keeps coming up in the literature. Because of the loose connection that can be drawn between postmodernism, poststructuralism, Marxism and feminism, some critics conflate discourses by positioning humanist against anti-humanist perspectives. Postmodernism (a blanket term which can include poststructuralism), feminism, and neo-Marxism (a version of Marxism associated particularly with Louis Althusser) are often grouped together. The theories named above share some common ground in that they reject aspects of the scientific method, hold a relativist view of truth and knowledge, and deny the ability of human beings to gain direct contact with reality. Indeed, in relation to deconstruction, Derrida directly acknowledges deconstruction's debt to Marxism:

Deconstruction has never had any sense or interest, in my view at least, except as a radicalization, which is to say also in the tradition of a certain Marxism, in a certain spirit of Marxism (Derrida 1994, p 88).

Certainly, in Australia as already discussed, for example in relation to the emergence of feminist philosophy at Sydney University, Marxism has had a significant impact on feminism. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Women's Liberation Movement engaged with forms of Marxism and socialism, as is evidenced in the 'Women and Labour' conferences.²¹¹ However, by the 1980s, there was an intellectual shift in feminism, from the 'academic left' towards a 'postmodern' influence (Henderson 1998, p 50). This shift is linked to the emergence of Women's Studies, in the university, and the establishment of theoretical journals. Indeed, according to Threadgold, from 1985 (with the publication of the journal *Australian Feminist Studies or AFS*) feminism in Australia takes on a more academic style (Threadgold 2000a, p 39). While Threadgold is referring to the importance of research in feminist work, some feminists whose commitments remained with a socialist agenda demurred, for example Chilla Bulbeck,

[i]nterrogates the common assumption that women's studies in Australia has shifted from a commitment to the liberation of women as a unity to a more complicated and theoretical project informed by the post-discourses: postmodernism, postcolonialism, post-structuralism, psycho-analysis (Bulbeck 2001, p 18).

²¹¹ The 'Women and Labour' Conferences were very important. Ostensibly socialist feminists attended but everyone went and they gradually included new perspectives from other disciplines. Also, poststructuralist conferences from the mid 1980s attracted feminists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Toril Moi, Caroline Burke and Patti Lather.

In this statement, Bulbeck alludes to both issues raised in this chapter. First is the tension of rethinking, or reconceptualizing the women's movement from a unified emancipatory movement towards the recognition of the violence of this artificial unity – one that excludes more than it includes. Second, she points to the difficulty of adopting a new theory to address old problems: one that challenges 'commonsense' assumptions about the category woman. Bulbeck's paper involved, among other things, a content analysis of three Australian feminist journals - *Refractory Girl*, *Hecate*, and *Australian Feminist Studies* – from 1975 to 1999. Bulbeck claims that references to 'post-discourses' steadily increased in feminist journals, indicating a general trend among feminists towards the postmodern (Bulbeck 2001, p 31). The inference is that feminists involved in the post-discourses (to borrow from Bulbeck) were involved in a 'theoretical' rather than a political project. While this distinction, or division, is not tenable, it does draw attention to a change in the focus of academic feminism.²¹² However, Bulbeck assumes that where feminists use aspects of postmodernism or poststructuralism to inform their research, their approach is poststructuralist.²¹³ For instance, feminists like Seyla Benhabib incorporate some poststructural tenets, but in the main, their position is not poststructuralist, or postmodern. Benhabib and Butler have long debated the possibility of adopting some poststructuralist, or even postmodern, principles while retaining modernist concepts like the 'subject'.²¹⁴ Discord among feminists who want to work within the Enlightenment project and feminists who want to challenge and build on these ideas has continued since the early 1980s.²¹⁵

Nevertheless, currently a particular type of Australian academic feminism is privileged in journals and the direction taken in conferences, a trend noted as early as the mid-1990s in several dissenting articles and books.²¹⁶ However, to say that

²¹² It is problematic from a deconstruction point of view to argue that politics is separate from theory. For instance, theory and politics are part of the same coin: theory develops out of a political need, and politics is informed by theoretical positions. The politics of deconstruction is in the act of destabilizing existing grounds for political thought and action.

²¹³ Having said that, there is no doubt that the term 'postmodernism' is now frequently cited in journals and conference titles. See Kirby (1994, p 120-132) for a detailed account.

²¹⁴ See Chapter 3, for a detailed account of these debates.

²¹⁵ It is important to stress that it is not simply a matter of policing boundaries, that is, defending or keeping modernism or postmodernism pure from contamination. Most feminists working with postmodern theories recognize that postmodernism is intimately connected to modernism.

²¹⁶ For example, see J Curthoys (1997).

feminism has no political relevance or that it is on the verge of a crisis because of the status of one type of feminism is to simplify and collapse together the many feminisms that operate in Australia. Moreover, a general lack of understanding about the differences between postmodern, poststructural, and even psychoanalytic approaches adds to the confusion, especially when the most obscure aspects of each theory are married together and labelled 'postmodern'.²¹⁷ In other words, the perils of collapsing the post discourses arise from a humanist speaking position, and produce one anti-humanist discourse.

The Need for Theory

In the 1980s, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identified one of the main concerns for feminists with utilising deconstruction as a political tool (Spivak 1989, p 206–223). From the outset, there has been a divide in feminism between feminists working within theoretical frameworks and feminists working within the practical/political. Certainly, feminists have been doing both (theory and practice), in varying degrees for a long time; however, there is an argument that feminism as a grassroots movement has little need for theory, or philosophy, especially one as 'obscure' as deconstruction. In the 1970s and 1980s, socialist, liberal, and radical feminist theories were contested within feminism. By the late 1990s, however, the ideologies that informed liberal and socialist feminist theories had become invisible, or taken for granted, in debates that challenged the use of theory. In other words, socialist or radical Marxist positions, or tenets, are not challenged in the same way as postmodern or poststructuralist positions.

As stated in Chapter Three, the way feminists choose to define concepts like power, politics and theory will ultimately determine strategies for resistance. In the 1980s, for radical feminists like Rowland, theory had a specific role to play. She states:

We need theory within feminism for a number of reasons: to articulate patterns of oppression; to develop analyses of that oppression; and having uncovered a 'source' of inequality, we can develop strategies for change based upon it (Rowland 1987, p 521-522).

²¹⁷ The conflation of the 'post' discourses is taken up in Chapter 1.

The desire to “uncover a ‘source’ of inequality” proved to be very difficult and divisive among feminists.²¹⁸ A politics based on ‘patterns of oppression’ does not acknowledge that some women benefit from other women’s oppression, thus problematising concepts like equality and unity. By the mid 1980s, “the realisation that ‘sisterhood’ was inadequate as a strategy for women’s liberation” caused much chaos and discomfort, as noted by Bronwen Levy at the ‘Fourth Women & Labour Conference’ (1984) in Brisbane (Levy 1984, p 105). This was exacerbated by the fact that this particular conference was supported and funded, largely, by radical feminists who advocated ‘sisterhood’ as a starting point for political change (Morris 1984).²¹⁹ According to Gunew and Yeatman, the necessity to move away from the binary thinking associated with identity politics was one of the battles that led towards poststructuralism.²²⁰

In the 1980s, some feminists looked to poststructuralism for a way to overcome the impasse created by emancipatory politics.²²¹ As discussed earlier, a shift towards theories of difference that do not reflect emancipatory goals within a politics of sameness caused anxiety and antagonism among some feminists. Most of the concerns raised by feminists who object to deconstruction emanate out of the identity politics debates, which are discussed in detail in Chapter Two, in particular the need to remain political (unified/universal) while recognizing differences (fractured/contingent). Indeed, the move towards a more symbolic representation of women’s oppression (characterised as ‘purely’ theoretical by some) has augmented a division among feminists in Australia. Complex and sophisticated theories, which have proven useful for some feminists to problematise subjectivity in particular, further alienate other feminists. Again, the issue taken up in this thesis is not that feminists are critical of new theories but the type of criticism offered. For instance, the argument that “some difficult ideas require the learning of a new language” is reasonable compared to the more defensive criticism that “knowledge [is] coded in

²¹⁸ See Chapter 2.

²¹⁹ See also Morris (1984, p 50-52).

²²⁰ Gunew’s work is also informed by postcolonial and indigenous theories of subjectivity. See also Yegenoglu, who states that while deconstruction “generated the feeling of unease and hesitancy” because it challenges notions of agency and political action, it also “exposes the subject as a historical construction – European, male and bourgeois” (Yegenoglu 1998, p 5).

²²¹ Chapter 2 discusses the issues that were the cause of this impasse.

inaccessible language for the purposes of restricting access to the few who have the code” (Rowland 1987, p 522). Even so, neither of these comments are adequate explanations for the collapse of the unified subject and movement (that were never unified in the first place).

Not surprisingly, antagonism was mostly evident at feminist conferences, as they brought together women whose theoretical frameworks often clashed. These exchanges involved academic women and non-academic women who felt betrayed by Women’s Studies. For instance, a heated exchange between Jill Matthews and Meaghan Morris began when Matthews published a report on a UK conference in the first issue of *Australian Feminist Studies* (AFS Summer, No. 1, 1985). The conference title was ‘The Third Theory and Text Conference: Sexual Difference’, held at the University of Southampton, July 1985. Matthews claims that:

In the session on Feminism and Psychoanalysis, after a number of gratuitous insults to feminism, one paper settled into an interminable linguistic analysis of ‘Hysteron and proteron: or “Women first”, which was apparently about feminism’s dual project of economics and theology. A steady stream of women walked out in anger, supplemented by another stream in boredom or incomprehension. I believe there were about a dozen left in the audience almost an hour later, some of whom thought the paper to have been an exquisite example of Derridean analysis (Matthews 1985, p 126).

Following on she wrote:

All the big names of the small journals were there. But I clearly hadn’t trained sufficiently for it, and could take in only parts until the final session, on Feminist Criticism, when a less refined view of the world and a language to express it returned to the stage. In particular, Elaine Showalter spoke of her unease at being hustled off to post-feminism and ‘gender studies’, of the need for women’s studies to move forward on the question of sexual difference without breaking its links with the women’s movement outside. She argues that the mere opening up of the question of gender was not feminist criticism, and that structures were not changed by discourse. She warned against the easy absorption of feminist criticism into the male stronghold of academic discourse, and immortalised Ken Ruthven (author of *Feminist Literary Studies*) by paraphrase: ‘feminist criticism is too important to be left in the hands of feminists’. She asked whether ‘sexual difference’ was now a code word meaning ‘not to talk about women’ (Matthews 1985, p 126–127).

Matthews is not alone in noting Ruthven’s unfortunate comments about women and feminism.²²² In response, Morris resents Matthews’ suggestion that feminists need to “get into ‘training’ to follow some of the contributions” at the conference (Morris

²²² Renate Klein also talks of the ‘irony’ of men in feminism. However, a number of collaborative projects with men, have contributed to feminist theory. In particular, two such studies stand out: *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader* (Frow and Morris 1993) and *Men in Feminism* (Jardine and Smith 1987).

1986, p 104). By contrast with more positive views of Australian feminism at the crossroads (Sheridan 1988, p 1), Morris goes on to say that, “I think that the feminist studies field here [in Australia] is one of the most narrowly based and incurious in the world” (Morris 1986, p 104).²²³ She concludes with “I know that my tastes and interests are minoritarian in women’s studies (though not so much so, I suspect, in the context of bookshop–publics these days)” (Morris 1986, p 105). Matthews defends her review in the subsequent issue of *Australian Feminist Studies*:

[Morris] is critical of my apparent refusal to ‘train’ and hence my denial of courtesy to and curiosity about other women’s work, ‘whatever its difficulties’. (In self–defence here, what I wrote was that ‘I clearly hadn’t trained *sufficiently*’, which in the face of Meaghan’s misunderstanding, was an unnecessary and self–deprecating joke. I have been trying to get on top of the literature and its issues for some years now, but still find it extremely difficult, elusive, time–consuming ... and nameless) (Matthews 1985, p 105, author’s emphasis).

Matthews’ report is illustrative of a variety of struggles that occurred at feminist conferences all over the world, as women from different positions were brought together and challenged by new knowledge claims. Matthews’ comments, intentionally or otherwise, are dismissive of a particular type of feminist work. Her point, however, reflects the frustration felt by many feminists at the time. For some feminists in the 1980s, poststructuralist theory was overly difficult and elusive. The difficulty depended on the type of education that feminists had undertaken. For instance feminists who came from a positivist background had more difficulty than feminists who came from a philosophy, literature, or French language background. It is useful to mention that, until the late 1980s, there were very few Australian feminist secondary texts that could be used to introduce students lacking a philosophical background to French philosophy. *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (1989) written by Elizabeth Grosz “was the first [Australian authored text] to offer a substantial introduction to what many regarded as a new intellectual current” (Deutscher 1998, p 13). More recently, Matthews has shifted away from the position discussed above towards a more sympathetic relationship with poststructuralism.²²⁴

²²³ While Morris seems to be contradicting Sheridan in *Grafts*, it is important to acknowledge that they are talking about a different type of feminist engagement with theory: Morris with poststructuralism and Sheridan with progressive socialism and radical feminism.

²²⁴ For example, see Matthews (2005).

In a similar vein, after attending the 1985 Woman's Conference held in Sydney, Diane Court wrote to *Australian Feminist Studies*:

Conferences, particularly those derived from social movement politics, are an expression of the political state of play. It was the *symbolised state of play* which angered me, given my own commitment to gender studies. To me, it represented feminism's incipient defeat, at best cooption, by the dominant intellectual forces. As an undeconstructed feminist, as much concerned with practices as with how we might talk about them, I see those intellectual forces as the hegemonic gendered class structures which the new feminism once had the potential of challenging and transforming (Court 1986, p 56, my emphasis).

While Court's reference to a 'symbolised state of play' is indicative of the objection driving the theory/practice division in Australia, it is also evidence of the introduction of new intellectual currents and the unease they can generate.

While these debates date back to the mid 1980s, many aspects persist today. Diprose claims that feminist philosophy in Australia is now an established category that should require little defence. However, she is disturbed by three trends in Australia that once again put into question not only the identity of feminism, but also try to dismiss or undermine the 'usefulness' of deconstruction for feminism. According to Diprose:

The disturbance that has made me [Diprose] think comes from at least three directions. The first is from the guardians of economic rationalism in Australian universities who reward the productivity of instrumental reason that would teach for vocational purposes in accordance with student interest and in response to the demands of industry. The second disturbance comes from a current trend of dismissing the ideas of contemporary cultural theory (particularly what its critics call postmodern or poststructural theory) on the grounds of its apparent inaccessibility and lack of reason. The third source of my irritation is a recent attack on academic feminism, especially that which might be considered 'deconstructive;' and that which is critical of scientific concepts, for sacrificing the idea of liberation in favour of seeking power for itself and for the madness of its method, for its 'systematic and pervasive confusions, logical slides and the mode of argument which ... refuses to meet the tests of genuine reason' (J Curthoys 1997, p 10)" (Diprose 2000, p 116).

Interestingly, the current climate for social movements is characterized as "left melancholy" whereby social movements like feminism long "for a time when goals and strategy were clearly and more simply political", if ever such a time existed (Maddison 2002, p 6).

Philosophy like any other field requires some prior knowledge in order to follow what can be very complex arguments. In his defence of deconstruction's complexity,

Derrida says, “I do not expect to sit in on a lecture in advanced physics and be annoyed if I don’t understand or follow the arguments”. Likewise deconstruction has come out of a particular tradition – obviously without some knowledge of this tradition it can be difficult to follow. In response to critics who claim deconstruction is *too* difficult, Derrida states:

one does not always write with a desire to be understood – that there is a paradoxical desire not to be understood. It’s not simple, but there is a certain ‘I hope that not everyone understands everything about this text’, because if such a transparency of intelligibility were ensured it would destroy the text, it would show that the text has no future [*avenir*], that it does not overflow the present, that it is consumed immediately (Derrida 2001a, p 30).

Derrida’s point is that for a text to offer a different way of conceptualising a problem or presenting a view, what he refers to as ‘an opening’, means that the text will not be understood immediately. If readers can incorporate, or assimilate, what they are reading immediately, then the text is not a departure, not a possibility for becoming a way of radically challenging current ways of thinking. Therefore, Derrida states that his prose ‘opens up’ the text by offering several meanings, depending on the reader’s background, or the context in which they are reading it. The text can then be re-read over and over, each time offering the reader new insights, and/or challenging existing ideas.

Australian Feminists and Theory

Understandings, or mis-understandings, of poststructuralist concepts such as ‘woman’, discourse, subjectivity, and ‘the political’ have been the cause of some heated debates amongst feminists in Australia. This section will build on earlier discussions about subjectivity and the political by focusing on specific Australian contributions. Thus, a brief discussion ensues on the meaning of discourse, subjectivity and the political from an Australian perspective.

It is pertinent to begin with Matthews’ comment, noted earlier, “that structures are not changed by discourse” (Matthews 1986, p 126). Unfortunately, Matthews does not elaborate on her understanding of discourse. However, for some Australian feminists, discourses are not disparate ideas or vague concepts; they have material effects. For Rosemary Pringle “discourses relate to wider frameworks of meaning, are inseparable from practices, and frequently have strong institutional bases.

Discourse practices routinely produce power and resistance” (Pringle and Watson 1992, p 86).²²⁵ This understanding of discourse has significance for other interrelated concepts in feminism, like subjectivity, which is “formed within the network of material and discursive practices that constitute the individual’s experience” (Cranny-Francis et al. 2003, p 11). That is, we come to be who we are in an ongoing practice of being positioned by, and positioning ourselves, within discourse. Theorizing around issues such as subjectivity is essential for informing and re-working practical/political agendas. One is not possible, or at best, very difficult without the other.

For Kirby, the political is embedded in phallogentric discourses, as is feminism:

Feminism is not ‘the other’ of patriarchal repression, if by that we mean that feminism has an autonomous political will of its own. The political force field that is phallogentrism also produces the specificity of what we call feminism. This irony does not mean that feminism is subsumed to phallogentrism. Rather, it implies that there is more to phallogentrism than its binary articulation reveals – the phallus has a hole in it! And further, it implies that the political grain of representation entails a complexity that both contains and produces; it inhibits and constitutes in the same movement (Kirby 1994, p 127).

Clearly feminist understandings of the ‘political’ have developed alongside competing notions of subjectivity. Peggy Kamuf states:

A deconstruction of subjectivisms [sic] (including feminist subjectivisms) has necessarily to entail a *different* sense of the political, one that does not project the eventual realization of a fully present (appropriated) subject that would be at the same time fully representative, one that is not itself shaped and determined by the version of the subject as self-presence (Kamuf 1997, p 119).

Deconstruction allows feminism to redefine the political, while at the same time being vigilant of fixed categories. It has enabled feminism to recognize that a decision (necessarily) is always made (who is included, who is excluded, and so on). To recognize the violence in all interactions is an engagement in ethics (responsibilities). In other words, for political change to occur, violence (in Derridean terms) must first be identified and (constantly) re-invented (reduced). Derrida claims that all laws are violent. In fact, no law can be so neutral as to cause

²²⁵ Foucauldian critic and scholar of class in Australia, Lynette Finch, defines discourse as:

[T]he ways of understanding, interpreting, making sense of and reacting to a ‘real’, which is impossible to know. We can only know discourse and never reality. It is, therefore, not possible to have true or false discourses, although rational and irrational discourses are quite possible. Judgements about the truth or falsity of discourses would be measured against a real relation to reality and discourse theory is not concerned with real relations to reality, but only with ways of making sense of that reality (Finch 1993, p 5).

no violence.²²⁶ Drucilla Cornell uses deconstruction to demonstrate the violence inherent in Law, especially in her earlier works.²²⁷

Deconstruction, as a subversive project, questions any ‘common sense’ assumptions that limit, or prescribe, what is possible. Sara Ahmed, an Australian expatriate, states that:

Feminism, like other forms of critical theorizing, is about disputing those ‘theories’ which are hegemonic, that is, those theories which are not recognized as theories as they are assumed to be common sense or necessary (Ahmed 2000, p 99).

Thus, the importance of deconstructing theories that fix concepts of subjectivity, as well as notions of the political (feminist and non–feminist).

The tension between theory and practice needs to be deconstructed so that different ways of approaching systemic inequalities may be addressed. The theory/practice debates often present the binary theory/practice as diametrically opposed. In response to a “suspicion of feminists involved in doing work that is named as ‘theory’” feminists need to “re–think the relationship between writing and action, as irreducible to the theory/practice division” (Ahmed 2000, p 98, p 100).²²⁸

Conclusion

The beginnings of deconstruction in Women’s Studies in Australia can be traced to a number of factors. The first refers to the opposition Women’s Studies met when it was established and the subsequent development of Women’s Studies as a discipline of knowledge. The second and related factor is Women’s Studies’ affiliation with Marxism. The way that Women’s Studies was established in the university has a similar history to Marxism; indeed in some universities it was Marxism that led the way for Women’s Studies. This chapter highlights the debate within

²²⁶ See Chapter 3 for an in-depth discussion on this point.

²²⁷ See especially Cornell (1992a).

²²⁸ Elizabeth Ermarth refers to two types of theory: the constructive and the subversive (Ermarth 2000, p 116). Constructive theory works within the system and therefore its effect in producing change is minimal – for instance, while there has been a lot of progressive legislation, it has also been regressive in reducing women to the (almost) same as men. On the other hand, subversive theory “acts to destabilize power relations” which would significantly affect women’s lived experience (Ermarth 2000, p 116).

socialism/Marxism concerning the limitations of materialist theory, which led to an engagement with Althusser and later Foucault. For some feminists Derridean deconstruction was not as accessible as Foucault's work. Nevertheless, many feminist academics who now adopt a deconstructive framework came out of a leftist, or Marxist, background. Deconstruction was seen as a way of overcoming some of the limitations of Marxism, but has certainly not had the same sort of impact that Foucault's work has, especially in the social sciences.

This chapter also draws attention to the initial resistance to deconstruction by some Australian feminists. Two main areas of resistance are identified. First, objections to deconstruction's complexity as a practical tool: for some deconstruction was seen to be deliberately obtuse. Second, in order to benefit from the insights of deconstruction, major categories like subjectivity and 'the political' needed to be rethought. This requires a (radical) reworking of feminist goals, which some feminists believed compromise the feminist project. Indeed, for some feminists a shift in the direction of deconstruction ultimately meant the demise of feminism. While some feminists have shifted position on deconstruction, there are still those who generally sympathise with either or both of these criticisms of deconstruction.

Deconstruction offers feminism a way to address issues that have plagued feminist discourse for some time. Deconstruction is seen as a way of reading women's space (place) in the current social order from a new perspective. Some feminists have developed deconstructive insights into a unique Australian deconstructive project. For instance, Australian feminists have developed deconstruction to advance understandings of the significance of embodiment,²²⁹ the politics of the everyday,²³⁰ ways of being in the world with others,²³¹ and challenging constructions of national identity,²³² to name but a few.

²²⁹ See, for example, Grosz (1995).

²³⁰ See, for example, Morris (1988).

²³¹ See, for example, Gunew (1994).

²³² See, for example, Schaffer (1988).

While deconstruction has a firm place within Australian feminism it still has a long way to go before its full potential is realised. Some of the possible paths for deconstruction are addressed in the conclusion.

Conclusion

The timing of this thesis is important as Australians are currently living under a conservative government that is further restricting women's role in society, for example, by limiting opportunities that enable women to combine mothering and paid work, and by dismantling the Affirmative Action legislation. Moreover, the effects of the current neo-liberal climate mean that individuals are made to take on responsibility for structural inequalities through a rhetoric of 'choice' (for example, "I am not succeeding because I do not work hard enough"). In this rhetoric, women are positioned outside of the discourses of power that construct subject identity, thus, it is difficult to negotiate a space for marginalised women to be heard, except as victims (Spivak 1988, p 308). In this climate it is becoming increasingly difficult for women to engage with legislative reforms (around issues such as sexual harassment, for example) as the rhetoric of individualism now positions such women as victims.²³³

The intention of this thesis was to examine the usefulness of Derridean deconstruction for feminist theory and praxis. Although this thesis focused on philosophy, it made reference to other related areas like cultural studies and literature. All the while the theories were examined through a feminist lens. As indicated in Chapters Two and Three, while a number of feminist studies have critiqued deconstruction, they did not offer a substantial account of the political efficacy of deconstruction nor did they address important questions raised by feminists who are critical of its usefulness. Chapters Four and Five looked at the way deconstruction was introduced within Australian Women's Studies programs as a way of explaining the importance of deconstruction for some feminist work and as a way of explaining some feminist resistance. To this effect the thesis has had several aims. First, the thesis situated deconstruction within a particular philosophical trajectory, one that is embedded in a structuralist tradition. Second, the thesis aimed to show that issues of subjectivity have been advanced by

²³³ For example, Anita Harris (2004) theorises two possible subject positions for women within neo-liberalism: 'can-do-girls' who succeed more or less like men as active subjects; or 'at-risk-girls' whose failure to succeed is constructed as their own fault and are positioned as victims.

deconstructive insights. Third, the thesis examined the political efficacy of deconstruction. Fourth, it addressed some of the principal feminist concerns with deconstruction. Fifth, it indicated how some feminists within Women's Studies programs in Australia came to adopt deconstruction while others resisted. In other words, the antecedents for deconstruction in Australia are traced as a way of demonstrating the importance of deconstruction for some Australian feminists.

Some Critical Findings

The thesis found that confusion for some feminists occurs because concepts are conflated, such as postmodernism and poststructuralism. As identified in Chapter One, the main issue with conflating these terms is that it effaces differences and discourages useful debate. Moreover, poststructural work, like Derrida's, refers to a specific trajectory that focuses on particular questions. In order to understand the context in which Derrida writes critics need to be familiar with the debates that he is engaging with. As argued in Chapter One the term 'postmodern' is very loose and is relatively meaningless in philosophical debates. Furthermore, (historically) feminism has had an uneasy relationship with philosophy but, as this thesis demonstrated, there is no escaping the effects of philosophy. Thus, feminists need to be equipped to respond to and challenge many types of philosophical positions, including poststructuralism. For a feminist response to be informed a close reading of the material needs to be conducted from within the framework that deconstruction draws on. Feminism will benefit significantly from examining and developing philosophical theories, like deconstruction, that advance understandings of subjectivity and consequently woman's subordination.

Chapter Two looked at how deconstruction has developed feminist understandings of subjectivity. Developments in the theorisation of subjectivity due to feminism's recognition of class, race, and sexuality, have led to an adoption of poststructuralist theories, including deconstruction. A detailed discussion of the usefulness of the 'Cartesian Subject' was undertaken. In particular, this chapter demonstrated that the mind/body dualism is antithetical to feminist agendas. Three feminist models of subjectivity were examined: the first two are based on the Cartesian model of subjectivity and thus aim to fix identity at some level, especially for the purposes of

emancipation or political action; the third model is based on deconstructive insights which trouble the notion of 'the subject'. This model asks that feminists look for a way of representing the feminine that challenges binary thinking based on phallogocentrism.

The subject of equality feminism is a 'human' subject that purports to be neutral, that is, not marked by feminine or masculine qualities. However, this subject is implicitly imbued with masculine characteristics that are naturalised in a patriarchal society. Thus, in this model of subjectivity, women can only be honorary men. Moreover, by positioning women as a group or a 'sisterhood' equality feminism fails to recognize the many differences among women, due to race, class and sexuality. On the other hand, the 'difference' model attempts to recognize the differences between women, based on race, class and sexuality, and also maintains that women are equal to men *but* different. Feminists reclaimed the feminine (including reproduction), which was devalued in the first model, and attempted to give feminine characteristics status in society. However, by trying to reverse binaries that are hierarchically entrenched in society, this model ends up upholding and reinforcing binary logic. Consequently, women are still devalued in a society that is fundamentally patriarchal. Moreover, this type of argument is contradictory because it claims to recognize differences based on class, race and sexuality but at the same time demands that these be put aside for political purposes or mobilisation. Thus, this subject is torn between the need to uphold the possibility for diversity and difference yet it relies on the myth of unity and solidarity.

The third model of subjectivity based on poststructuralist insights, which this thesis promotes, claims that the Cartesian subject is inherently flawed and should be viewed with suspicion. The issue at hand for poststructuralist feminists is to challenge phallogocentrism, which seeks univocal truths, and to develop new ways of understanding the feminine and the masculine. The focus for feminists like Luce Irigaray is on the symbolic order, which she claims cannot currently represent the feminine, as it is limited to meanings created within a masculine symbolic – woman in this order can only operate as a mimic of man. In this model, feminists must deconstruct oppressive frameworks that perpetuate disadvantage, including the term

'woman' itself. Only then is there a conceptual space for woman's self representation to be thought.

Chapter Three looked at the workings of Derridean deconstruction in detail and dealt with feminist objections as well as feminist developments. This chapter demonstrated that it is not easy to define or come up with an explicit working methodology for deconstruction. Derrida's focus is on the structure of binary logic, which privileges one term over the other, for example, presence over absence, and speech over writing. He looked at the way binaries operate, beginning with speech/writing, which he claims is fundamental to western philosophy. Western philosophy is grounded on a metaphysics of presence where language is seen to be a neutral and transparent way of expressing philosophical truths. For Derrida, language is not neutral; it produces effects. By deconstructing texts Derrida is able to show the constant play within language. His style of writing, especially in relation to the concept of *differánce*, disrupts binary thinking and philosophy's quest for unitary truth. For feminism, *differánce* offers a way of thinking sexual difference that does not deny differences but at the same time does not create false hierarchies. Like Derrida, Irigaray claims that the term 'woman' is trapped inside a metaphysics of presence, where definition is only possible with reference to man. The question that dominates Irigaray's work is how to imagine the feminine outside of a masculine symbolic order, beyond binaries. The future, a space where multiple meanings can be thought, is a future 'not yet' or 'to come' because until *differánce* is a possibility this future is unimaginable. Thus, *difference* and *écriture féminine*, among other projects, are part of the political intervention of deconstruction.

Chapter Three also demonstrated that deconstruction's potential for political change is not comprehensible within existing paradigms of what constitutes the political. According to Elizabeth Grosz:

That [Derrida's] works are seen as apolitical, as lacking a mode of political address, is surely the result of a certain freezing of politics and an attempt to constrain it into well-known or predetermined forms, forms we believe we already know (the "official" movements that attempt to represent minorities through some kind of representative structure, whether unions, political parties, advocacy groups and so on) – the very forms whose naturalness or stability is contestable through deconstruction (Grosz 2005, p 58).

Thus, concepts such as ‘the political’ need to be rethought in terms of ‘friendship’, ‘hospitality’, ‘the gift’, ‘*aporia* and promise’, and a ‘democracy to come’ if feminism is to move beyond a “politics of revenge” (Cornell 1991, p 185). Feminists, like Elizabeth Grosz, Gayatri Spivak, Drucilla Cornell, and Peggy Kamuf, have advanced deconstructive insights for feminist purposes.

This thesis also looked at the establishment of Women’s Studies as a discipline in the academy in Australia. The argument put forward was that Women’s Studies was established against considerable opposition from non-feminist women and male academics. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, there was a strong connection between the Women’s Liberation Movement and the establishment of Women’s Studies in Australian universities. This close initial connection with the Women’s Liberation Movement created particular problems when feminists began to draw on deconstruction as a theoretical tool, because a commitment to liberation was understood within a particular or limited framework. Moreover, feminist academics were under tremendous pressure from within the academy to become ‘academic’ and from the Women’s Liberation Movement to remain faithful to Women’s Liberation goals when designing the content and administration of Women’s Studies. The external and internal supports and overriding pressures were explored with the cases of Flinders, Sydney, Deakin, Griffith, and Adelaide Universities. It is also important to note that support from the community of feminists, from the Women’s Liberation Movement, was sought to counter opposition within the academy (for example, in supporting Women’s Studies at Adelaide University) and this extended a sense of obligation to the movement and hence to its resistance to ‘theory’.²³⁴

Chapter Five undertook an exploration of the theoretical concerns of Women’s Studies in the academy as a way of arguing that deconstruction in Australia was mainly progressed by disillusioned Marxists and socialist feminists who wanted to move beyond the impasse of Marxist theory. This line of argument is important in Australia as many Australian feminists come from a strong Marxist tradition. Moreover, the chapter found that feminists who implemented deconstruction first

²³⁴ It is also worth noting that many feminists who were part of the Women’s Liberation Movement undertook Women’s Studies courses at university (Kay Schaffer, pers. comm., 18 August 2006).

engaged with the work of Michel Foucault because of his critique of truth and knowledge, and his view of power as productive and not simply repressive. Foucault's anti-humanist understanding of subject formation within discourses also resonated with Australian feminists. Furthermore, Juliet Mitchell's work was also important because of her return to psychoanalysis, especially the work of Jacques Lacan. It was through poststructuralist understandings of discourses, the subconscious, and language that feminists read the work of Luce Irigaray. Unlike Foucault's work, gender is central to Irigaray's work and offers feminists a framework from which to rethink constructions of 'the feminine'.

Deconstruction entered the Australian academy via conferences, journals, core curriculum texts in Women's Studies programs, open university/distance education programs, overseas visitors, and Australian doctoral study abroad. Currently, Australian feminists are making a unique and significant contribution to feminist theory by using deconstruction. For example, the work of Elizabeth Grosz, Moira Gatens, Terry Threadgold, and Vicki Kirby, among others discussed in Chapter Five, is very important in contemporary debates, both in Australia and overseas. In particular, feminists who are interested in theories of embodiment (like Grosz) are well served by poststructuralist theories, including deconstruction.

Concluding Remarks

Derrida has never written on anything *other* than politics and violence, even if it is also true that he does not write *only* on politics and violence (Grosz 2005, p 56).

This thesis has demonstrated that some feminists have moved on from the humanist liberal model of understanding the world and have incorporated many of the insights of poststructuralism. The concepts that were taken up with the most fervour are those that challenged the way meaning is made, mostly from a Foucauldian stance. Concepts such as 'truth', especially questioning truth as unitary, the notion that binaries operate in a hierarchical manner, and that power is both productive and repressive, are in the main commonly accepted. On a broader note, deconstruction challenged Man as a unitary subject; reason as the paramount characteristic of Man; opened up understandings of unequal power relations and asymmetrical hierarchies; pointed the way towards acknowledgement of incommensurate multiple and

contradictory meanings within texts, institutions, and discourses; made theorists aware of language as metaphor, discourse as construction, and the significance of absences, to name but a few. Meaning, and meaning making, has shifted dramatically in the last few decades. Challenges to the unified subject, or the Cartesian subject, are pretty much universal. Feminists, who identified many problems with the fixing of subjectivity, including the exclusion of migrant, indigenous and lesbian voices, were among those who sparked these challenges.

This thesis argued that the principal reason for some feminists' inability to move away from the Cartesian subject is because, while feminists like Nancy Fraser, Seyla Benhabib, Robyn Rowland, and Renate Klein may accept critiques of the subject, they have not challenged the meaning of 'the political' in the same way as Drucilla Cornell or Elizabeth Grosz. In the main, political action for these feminists is not conceived as possible without a fixed subject of some description. Thus, as was shown in this thesis, deconstructing 'the political' as well as 'the subject' will open up possibilities for advancing feminist questions within theory and praxis.

It is important to understand the way that deconstruction can be used by feminists to rethink issues, such as subjectivity and the political. The first part of this thesis demonstrated that, for some feminists, deconstruction consists of identifying binaries in texts and highlighting how the text privileges one term over the other: what can be understood as a 'lite' form of deconstruction. While this is useful work it is only scratching at the surface of deconstruction. Without a doubt, it is important to highlight binary operations in texts (to recognize the violence necessary to support them), whether they are policy documents or works of fiction. The next step is to reverse the binary and show the effects of binary thinking, that is, disrupt or unsettle meaning (in most cases to highlight women's absence except as the other of man). However, to stop at reversal means that the structures which support binary thinking are left undisturbed, and thus they will remain, or regain, dominance. Therefore, the final goal for feminism should be to find a way to displace the need for a system based on binary logic: a system that is inherently violent. This is the political imperative of deconstruction and it is this aspect of deconstruction that is the most

difficult for some feminists to incorporate into their deconstruction of texts as well as their 'politics'.

Elizabeth Grosz has been the most influential Australian feminist in the promulgation of deconstruction and French feminism in general. In her latest book *Time Travels* (2005) she explores:

the becoming-art of politics; that is, ...[it] advocates a politics of surprise, a politics that cannot be mapped out in advance, a politics linked to invention, directed at more an experimentation in ways of living than in policy and step-by-step directed change, a politics invested more in its processes than in its results (Grosz 2005, p 2).

Grosz promotes Derrida's understanding of the political as violence and a democracy 'to come'. However, as discussed in this thesis, a democracy 'to come' is not possible without deconstructing 'the political', as well as the subject. The deconstruction of these critical terms will lead to a thinking beyond binaries to a 'not yet' – a 'to come' which will impact on women's, indigenous peoples' (reconciliation and forgiveness), and refugee issues in Australia.²³⁵ Deconstruction, in an ethical domain, involves an 'ethics of the other' or a responsibility for the other.

As shown in Chapters One, Two and Three, a key problem for some feminists is that they draw a (false) distinction between the 'real' as opposed to the 'abstract' or theoretical. Deconstruction is placed into the realm of the abstract and therefore deemed unable to change the 'real'. However, according to Grosz, Derrida's work on violence,

could nonetheless benefit those who wish to analyse its most concrete forms: feminist and queer activists analysing domestic and sexual violence, political theorists analysing nationalist and ethnic violence, leftists analysing the violence of governments and institutions, Marxists analysing the violence of economic privilege may feel that deconstruction is a form of intellectual mediation that deflects from their more direct and pressing activities, but until violence is understood in all its ironic complexity, it flourishes unabated (Grosz 2005, p 57).

By way of example, a neo-liberal conservative party in Australia, the Howard Government, has since its election in 1996 attempted to shift the blame for economic inequalities onto 'elites', left wing intellectuals, and marginal groups (like

²³⁵ Derrida enters the political arena using a deconstructive stance. In his essay 'On Cosmopolitanism', he addresses the concerns of refugees in France and as a global responsibility; and in 'On Forgiveness' he engages with crimes against humanity (Forgiveness) focusing on Apartheid in South Africa (Derrida 2001b). Both these examples are relevant in Australia with reference to refugees and Indigenous people.

Aboriginals, migrants, feminists and so on) rather than address “the effects of globalisation, economic rationalism and a retreating welfare state” (Bulbeck 2005, p 38). In Australia, anti-intellectualism pervades political discourse and is promulgated through the media (Bulbeck 2005, p 39). Women’s rights are no longer seen to be a priority for the government. In fact, most women’s organisations are being grossly under-funded and generally ignored by government ministers, while some are being abolished altogether.²³⁶ By discrediting academics as ‘elites’, the neo-liberal conservative government can proceed without censoring. Bulbeck cannot see how the post-discourses, such as deconstruction can offer Australians a way of fighting back (Bulbeck 2005, p 45). As I stated in Chapter Two, and throughout the thesis, a problem exists with emancipatory politics, for instance, on the one hand fighting for a claim to subjectivity that allows women some access to rights within the existing order, and on the other, the myriad of issues that any inclusion involves, for instance loss of specificity (as this subject is inherently masculine). Roslyn Diprose acknowledges this dilemma, when she says that we need a subject that can recognize its body and other bodies and not be deprived of autonomy (Diprose 1994, p 115). By returning to the example of the pregnant body raised before, we can see that

a body capable of pregnancy can neither regard her body as a fully free expression of itself, nor regard the body to which it will give birth as definitively other. Indeed, if the masculine imaginary has established the subject as pure self-transcendence, freed from all natural determination, then the recognition of an *other* subjectivity would not be the passive maternal body beyond all culture and thought, but a subject who has being and specificity only through the force and potential of its body (Colebrook 2004, p 203).

As shown in this thesis, Irigaray offers a way of imagining this kind of ‘subjectivity’; a way of thinking through the relationship between the mind and body. Thus, only by imagining other ways of being can women achieve any lasting change. According to Moira Gatens:

A micropolitical feminism is able to imagine alternative possible forms of sociability. This power of imagining things otherwise, in concert with the imaginings of compatible others, has the creative power to decompose and recompose the social field, bit by bit, molecule by molecule (Gatens 2000, p 72)

²³⁶ See Bulbeck (2005) for a full account of the under-funding and censoring of women’s organisations.

There is no simple solution that will address the effects of the current political climate in Australia, and certainly none that will take effect immediately. Australians need to look for new ways of engaging with the current political climate, without compromising ethics or politics. As was stated earlier, a new approach requires that we look to the future. Grosz, in response to a similar criticism by Nancy Fraser, claims:

Fraser views politics as that which we can pragmatically recognize and understand in the present, not as a mode of addressing futures we cannot know with resources we are not sure will be adequate. She believes that a well-structured critique will reveal political problems and help us to 'correct' them, as if they were conceptual oversights instead of forms of power. She [Fraser] is committed to the solution, where Derrida's work, along with Deleuze's, addresses questions, problems, and how to live with them (Grosz 2005, p 222).

Politics, like the law, is an inherently conservative and conserving system (Cornell and Osborne 1995, p 32). Thus, as Cornell claims "when it is not endlessly contested, and when alternative forms of the most basic sense of support are not provided, the engendering system reasserts itself" and change is almost impossible (Cornell and Osborne 1995, p 34). Thus, it is important that feminists 'take to the streets' to fight for rights, but what is also needed is a new (or utopian) expression of what a politics of the future might be – the 'to come'.²³⁷ Without a radical vision for the future, one that offers a 'true' alternative, the way politics is practised will not change and will continue to disadvantage women.

An important part of the political project for feminism is the re-imagining of the feminine subject. Luce Irigaray's work on new ways of explaining the symbolic order and making a space for feminine subjectivity is very important. Irigaray rejects Lacan's model of the symbolic order which positions femininity as lack; rather she is working towards a model that recognizes feminine alterity. Irigaray's deconstructive approach leads her to an understanding of the symbolic order which explains man's

²³⁷ Threadgold is also critical of the distinction between a 'real' politics (for example, battling government funding) and deconstructing discourse constructs. She states that:

When semioticians, post-structuralists, or feminists ... declare that there are no 'facts', that there is no one single 'truth', no 'reality' that has not been constructed, the commonsense response tends to be in the order of ... 'if you're poor and hungry you know what reality is'. ... They are responses that take the form of constructing dichotomies, of setting up oppositions, between theory or metalanguage and the 'real issues' of politics and class, or between ideology ... and real structures like the economy, government and so on. ...[T]he continuing effects in the discourses of these sciences of the representation/reality problem and of the tendency for meaning-effects to be discounted as irrelevant are paramount (Threadgold 1990, p 4).

violence to woman. It is important to have models of subjectivity that seek to explain women's subordination and also move beyond.

In addressing deconstruction's usefulness to feminism this thesis has shown that, without a philosophical immersion in the poststructuralist tradition, feminists encounter many problems with deconstruction. While some problems stem from a refusal to engage with theory, most relate to a genuine confusion about the philosophical underpinnings of deconstruction. Some feminists have taken up some deconstructive techniques but fall short of embracing deconstruction as a radical politics. For deconstruction's full potential to be realised, more information about how deconstruction works should be made available in an accessible manner. An advanced knowledge of deconstruction needs to be fostered in Australian universities by developing Women's Studies undergraduate courses that introduce deconstruction to students. Deconstruction needs to be central to Women's Studies courses, so that young feminists are familiar with its principal tenets. In addition, an understanding of the political potential of deconstruction, including a review of 'the political' and what that means for feminism would also need ongoing exploration. Ideally, it would be beneficial to future deconstructionists if philosophy is taught in secondary schools as it is in most parts of Europe. While there are no easy or quick ways to understand the complexities of deconstruction, the effort required would be rewarded.

Deconstruction has already proven itself to be invaluable for feminist research. Feminists like Grosz, Butler, and Cornell to name a few, have advanced understandings of subject construction by using Derridean deconstruction in its most complex form. However, unless Derridean deconstruction is taken up in undergraduate courses it will remain the domain of a few.

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