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“CRITICAL DESIRE” AND THE FEMINIST OTHER OF CRITICAL THEORY

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by

Michael Edwin Lipscomb

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We approve the thesis of Michael E. Lipscomb

08/13/2001

Nancy S. Love
Associate Professor of Political Science and
Speech Communications
Thesis Advisor
Chair of Committee

Robert E. O'Connor
Associate Professor of Political Science

Eric Plutzer
Associate Professor of Political Science

Charles E. Scott
Edwin Earle Sparks Professor of Philosophy

Stephen K. White
Professor of Political Science
University of Virginia

Frank R. Baumgautner
Professor of Political Science
Head of the Department of Political Science

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how desire poses an inescapable, if often under articulated, challenge for all critical political projects that not only seek to interpret the world, but also “to change it.” The effort to shape this future political space, however, carries the social theorist towards dangerous terrain. In a century that has witnessed the noble futures promised by Hitler, Stalin, and Pol Pot collapse into totalitarian horror, this link between critical social theory and its utopian aspirations cannot be ignored. Thus, the critical theorist can no longer avoid thinking through and against the authoritarian necessity borne by the desire for an alternative to the current socio-political order. By extension, one is enjoined to theorize about the desire for identity, whether individually, collectively, or meta-politically, in ways that already call that desire into question.

My dissertation explores this general tension within critical theory – between the longing for identity and its dangers – by taking up a specific instance of its application: the possibilities and limits encountered by a male heterosexual writing about women and feminism. That relationship is a complex one: any male who addresses women, regardless of his sympathy for their interests, runs the risk of reinscribing the paternalist oversight that feminism has sought to escape. For the heterosexual, this threat is doubled by the control implicit in his seemingly natural desire and love for women. The general problem of how the critical theorist might enact his or her necessary desire is given an exemplary specification: how might men who sympathize with the goals of feminism comport themselves towards women?

This dissertation explores this question through what might be called a philosophical case study: I trace the force of desire in Nietzsche’s life and work. Reading

Nietzsche in the context of the different desires (biographical, physiological, philosophical, etc.) that traverse, inflect, and expand beyond his texts, Nietzsche suggests how we might rethink desire as a confluence of forces that precedes and disrupts the fiction of the ego. His comparison of “woman” to the “truth” that always remains beyond our grasp allows us to conceptualize desire as a difference that always remains “other” to our experience. Nietzsche’s thought thus breaks up the monological obsessions of critical theory, opening up a space in its thought that militates against any final, and thus potentially authoritarian, set of political conclusions. Ironically, given his famous misogyny, Nietzsche’s thought has thus proven exemplary for feminist efforts to theorize a post-identitarian notion of feminist solidarity. These Nietzschean inflected feminisms, in turn, serve as powerful disruptions of the notions of consensus that underwrite some of our most powerful descriptions of a normatively admirable liberal politics. Without such interruptions, such consensus always runs the risk of excluding concrete, embodied others from the public forms of political participation at which these forms of liberalism putatively aim.

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Chapter One: Critical Theory as “Critical Desire”

I. The Paradox of Critical Theory

Here. That a work would emerge in this way, and in this particular historical and social context – that seems to be what governs our voice, what draws out the limits of our horizons, marking out the terrain where we become who we are. That terrain, after all, is where transformations occur, where what “is” becomes something else. It is in this space, where necessary moments of identity reach their limits and come to question their coherence and their value, that a more mature critical theory might be articulated.

“Critical theory,” like all labels, suggests a coherence, something stable, that can be fixed in space and time. It stands for something. In fact, the thinkers who first took this title – Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse, for example – did so for tactical reasons. This effort at self-definition was part of an effort to *realize* their thought, to institutionalize their particular alternative to the insidious, alienating powers of instrumental reason. This institutionalization marks a resistance to the destructive, assimilating power of bureaucratic-capitalist time; it was, as a political action launched from within the academy, an effort to make one’s ideals *matter*, to give them a weightiness able “To trouble the living stream.”¹

¹ William Butler Yeats, “Easter 1916,” in *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, ed. by Richard Ellmann and O’Clair (New York, Norton), 130. Yeats’ poem serves as a meditation on the central paradox encountered by any interventionary politics. The poem’s celebration of the revolutionary conspirators’ dream is held in tension with the recognition that “Too long a sacrifice/Can make a stone of the heart.” For a discussion of the tension between Yeats as the poet of anti-colonialist liberation and Yeats as the fascist sympathizer, see Edward Said, “Yeats and Decolonization,” in Dennis Walder, ed., *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 34 - 41.

Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse gleaned from Marx the theoretical leverage for this gravity: the faith in a rational future. This faith acted as a crucial anchor for critical theory in at least two important, interrelated ways. On the one hand, a rational future was and remains the normative goal of critical theory – it is the imagined, if never clearly articulated, alternative to the irrationality and systematic inequalities of 20th century consumer capitalism. It is the object of its desire. But perhaps even more immediately, this notion of a rational future suggests an epistemic space from which to critique the social world in which one lives. This imagined future, in other words, is more than critical theory’s utopian moment; it allows for the space of a critical distance from which to critique the present.²

The coherence of critical theory, however, is founded on a paradox, for critical theory is not merely the Marxism of a new generation – it was also an effort to read Marx’s thought as open, and not forever restrained by orthodox dogma. Such a reading was both a matter of *tactical necessity* and *normative prescription*. Freeing Marxist theory from the fetters of its Stalinist orthodoxy was tactically necessary because the revolution had not gone as planned; the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School understood themselves to be responding to the failures of Marxist practice. As Habermas puts it, critical theory “was initially developed in Horkheimer’s circle to think through political disappointments at the absence of revolution in the West, the development of Stalinism in Soviet Russia, and the victory of fascism in Germany.”³ These tactical considerations, however, are already

² David Held summarizes: “Each of the critical theorists maintained that although all knowledge is historically conditioned, truth claims can be rationally adjudicated independently of immediate social (e.g. class) interests. They defended the possibility of an independent moment of criticism.” David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 14 -15

³ Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*., Trans. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 116.

imbricated with the normative orientation of critical thought. The members of the Frankfurt School sought to deflect Marx's work in a way that might bring the political application of his thought into line with their concern with human freedom. The founding gesture of critical theory, therefore, has already announced its inevitable ethos of self-contestation. Critical theory has, since its inception, differentiated itself from its Marxist lineage by attending to the limits of its appeals to authority – to Marx himself, for example, but also to any innocent epistemic position from which to critique the social world of which it is a part.⁴

Inseparable from their Marxist lineage, these thinkers have aimed at changing what that lineage, now read backward and forward, might mean. Their thought is a *reconnaissance*: a literal “re-knowing” that, in its military sense, alerts us to how the terrain of battle can change importantly, in ways that those dulled by their immediate perspective or by traditional understandings might miss. Critical theory is therefore premised on the necessity of critically interrupting the authority of its aims, goals and tactics; its break with its own tradition enacts one of its primary tactical and normative *dicta*. Whatever its continued relationship to the “totalities” of its future goals, critical theory entails, as Michel Foucault said of Kant's understanding of the Enlightenment, “... looking for a difference.”

⁴Habermas has, in turn, responded to what he sees as the failures and confusions of the first generation of the Frankfurt School by reorganizing his understanding of critical theory around the notion of “communicative action.” Habermas's elaboration of an intersubjective ethics is an important contribution to critical theory's effort to negotiate the tension between the necessary coherence needed for social action and the authoritarian implications of any such action. Habermas's approach will be problematized in chapter five below. For more on the merits and limits of Habermas's normative project in relationship to postmodern thought, see Stephen K. White, *Political Theory and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). In the context of the present discussion, it remains the case that even within these different generational groups - amongst the original core group of the Institute of Social Research, or amongst Habermas and his closest followers – the differences between individual theorists suggests that the label critical theory “does not mean the same thing to all of its adherents.” Held, 15.

It entails asking the question “What difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?”⁵

The foundational moments of “critical theory” – its hope for a more rationally organized world and its embrace of disruptive critique – suggest an analogous paradox that haunts leftist thought in general. From Marx onward, the left has struggled with the tension that arises between the necessity of identity for political action and the anti-democratic dangers that inhere in all such identities. The debates between Marx and Bakunin, and these debates’ foreshadowing of the histories of actually existing Marxism, already capture the political and ethical stakes of this tension. For their part, Marx and Engels showed an appreciation for the realities of seizing political power. They argued that a successful revolution must limit bourgeois notions of political freedom. When Marx writes in the *Communist Manifesto* that “if, by means of a revolution,” the proletariat “makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production,” he is merely anticipating that the capitalists will not peacefully acquiesce to the confiscation of their property.⁶ Engels ridiculed the naiveté of the anarchists’ call for an intellectual leadership that would passively “midwife” society into a postcapitalist cooperative;⁷ he caustically asked if the anarchists had actually ever seen a revolution.⁸ This recognition of political realities would become the justification for Lenin’s insistence on a party vanguard capable of directing the movement’s consciousness through the hostile political terrain of proto-capitalist Russia. Such a

⁵ Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, edited by Paul Rabinow, trans. by Catherine Porter, with emendations (New York: The New Press, 1997), 305.

⁶ Marx, the *Communist Manifesto*, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1978), 38.

⁷ Frederick Engels, “Versus the Anarchists,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1978), 78.

⁸ Engels, “On Authority,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1978), 733.

vanguard, Lenin hoped, would not only provide the movement with generals who could coordinate the aims of its practical politics; it would also inculcate in the proletariat the revolutionary transformation of consciousness necessary for a post-capitalist order. But even in those circumstances where violence might not be necessary to achieve the transition to postcapitalism (as seemed to be the case in late nineteenth century Germany, where German Social Democracy was doing increasingly well at the polls), Engels had insisted that the party must act as one in order to maximize its tactical advantages. In electoral politics, political cohesion turns shared interests into a lever of political power.⁹

Bakunin, on the other hand, decried the authoritarian logic of Marx's belief that an inevitably successful economic revolution obviates the need for political struggle. At best, such a belief would seem to lead to a quietism that silently waits for the revolution that never arises. Bakunin recognized that, even more disturbingly, privileging the "the economic" over "the political" justifies Marx's willingness to create a hierarchy of power that would oversee the transition from capitalist to post-capitalist society. Marx's understanding of socialism's identity, Bakunin complained, would give the proletariat authority over the peasantry. Marx's "people's state," as the transitional government that would bridge the gap between the old power arrangements of the capitalist world and the stateless society of post-capitalism, would not be a state for all of the people. Furthermore, Bakunin was suspicious of the ways in which Marx's scientific socialism

⁹ Engels argued that in the context of German Social Democracy's surging power at the ballot box, the "main task" of socialists was to "keep this growth going without interruption until of itself it gets beyond the control of the ruling governmental system, not to fritter away this daily increasing shock force in advance guard fighting, but to keep it intact until the day of decision, ...", Friedrich Engels, from "Revolution: Peaceful or Violent?" in David McLellan, ed. *Marxism: Essential Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 73.

valorizes expert knowledge.¹⁰ In suggesting that the revolution depends upon this kind of expertise, Marx would give warrant to Lenin's effort to organize the Communist Party as the vanguard of the revolution. Trotsky, articulating Bakunin's insight into how authoritarian means have a habit of becoming authoratarian ends, accurately foresaw the course of Soviet Marxism. Lenin's centralism, he argued, presaged a slippery slope in which "the party organization substitutes itself for the party, the central committee substitutes itself for the [party] organization, and, finally, a 'dictator' substitutes himself for the central committee."¹¹

This long present tension, for a politics that aims to transform the structural basis of inequality - between the necessity, on the one hand, of a unified political will and, on the other hand, the suspicion that this necessity is threateningly authoritarian - continues to animate theoretical discussions within the academic left. The schism between poststructuralists and more traditionally Marxist scholars maps onto this split and marks out the terrain upon which critical theory's self-understanding is currently being contested. The polemics that erupted at a provocatively titled workshop on "Left Conservatism" at the University of California at Santa Cruz (and which subsequently spilled over onto the pages of *The Nation*) is indicative of a perennial problem for an interventionary, critical politics.¹² The "left conservatives," whether or not they retain the Marxist focus on class, or economic position, as the fundamental building block for

¹⁰ Nancy S. Love, *Understanding Dogmas and Dreams: A Text* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, Inc., 1998), 104 – 106. Love nicely summarizes the main points of debate between Marx and Bakunin. Though her typology of regimes distinguishes Bakunin's "social anarchism" from Marx's "socialism," the continuing importance of this seam for contemporary critical theorists makes it important to also understand this dissension as a conversation within socialism.

¹¹ As quoted in Love, 86.

¹² For some of this drama, see Paul Sand, "Left Conservatism," *The Nation*, March 9th, and the magazine's follow-up, "Exchange: Epistemology and Vinegar," *The Nation*, May 11th, 1998, 2, 59 – 60. For the original conference bulletin and the student counter-document, go to <http://www2.ucsc.edu/people/psand/conference/bulletin>.

an identity politics, are highly suspicious of poststructuralism's celebration of difference. To their minds, any such celebration maps all too easily onto the discourses of "freedom" used to justify the systematic inequalities of the capitalist status quo. Furthermore, privileging "difference" fails to address how a leftist politics could efficaciously intervene in the ongoing reproduction of capitalism and its ideological justifications. At its best, they argue, an infatuation with difference is ineffectual; at worst, it is actually conducive to the regeneration of the injustices of the status quo. The poststructuralists, on the other hand, argue that only an emphasis on freedom and on that which remains irreducible to any political formula can undercut the totalitarian threat inherent in an interventionary insistence on solidarity and equality.

Despite the value of this polemic, it ignores the ways in which post-structural and Marxist perspectives might hook up with one another. By working at the places where these different machines converge and transform one another, one may be able to more persuasively theorize about the links between the twin values of radical democracy: freedom and equality. One of the places where this convergence might occur is at the tensions sustained by the concept of desire. By excavating and working through this site of tension, it might be possible to begin to craft a more robust (and less mindlessly divided?) notion of the task of critical theory today.

II. (Critical) Desire

as I looked for common passions, sentiments shared by folks across race, class, gender, and sexual practice, I was struck by the depths of longing in many of us. Those without money long to find a way to get rid of the endless sense of deprivation. Those with money wonder why so much feels so meaningless and long to find the site of "meaning." Witnessing the genocidal ravages of drug addiction in black families and communities, I began to

“hear” that longing for a substance as, in part, a displacement for the longed-for liberation—the freedom to control one’s destiny. All too often our political desire for change is seen as separate from longing and passions that consume lots of time and energy in daily life. Particularly the realm of fantasy is often seen as completely separate from politics. Yet I think all the time black folk (especially the underclass) spend just fantasizing about what our lives would be like if there were no racism, no white supremacy. Surely our desire for radical social change is intimately linked with the desire to experience pleasure, erotic fulfillment, and a host of other passions. Then, on the flip side, there are many individuals with race, gender, and class privilege who are longing to see the kind of revolutionary change that will end domination and oppression even though their life will be utterly transformed. The shared space and feeling of “yearning” opens up the possibility of common ground where all these differences might meet and engage one another. It seemed appropriate then to speak this yearning.¹³

bell hooks

The counter time within critical theory, the source of its inherent untimeliness, can be framed by the ambiguities of its desire(s).

Straightforwardly, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines desire as “that feeling or emotion which is directed to the attainment or possession of some object from which pleasure or satisfaction is expected.”¹⁴ In its heart, critical theory is, and always has been, a matter of this simple notion of desire. It is always about wanting to get from “here” to “there,” about leveling a critique at the injustices of the political and social world in which we live so that we might configure that world more admirably. Behind the label of *critical* theory, an affirmative ideal, ethos, or moment announces itself as our desire for a better world. Critical theory, however, resists being bewitched by an ontological understanding of

¹³ bell hooks, “Liberation Scenes,” in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Culture* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 12 – 13.

¹⁴ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition, Volume IV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 522 – 523.

desire. We critical theorists do not fall head over heels, thinking that desire, in all of its modulations and effects, is “all good,” or that by overcoming the repression of our desire we could finally arrive at a future in which the political and the social were no longer germane. Rather, critical theory, in examining its animating desire, puts into practice a “critical desire.”

A “critical desire” underscores the simultaneous necessity and danger of desire for a critical appraisal of human self-understanding. In doing so, it is involved in a story as old as political philosophy itself. It echoes, for example, the double movement of desire in the corpus of Plato’s ethical and political thought. On the one hand, that desire draws man toward the Good, whose ideal form remains beyond his immediate reach.¹⁵ On the other hand, Plato warns that an uncritical celebration of an appetitive desire leads to a life that is unbalanced and thus tyrannical.¹⁶ The man who would unquestioningly acquiesce to his desires is only able to confront the world in terms of his received understandings. He is, like Nietzsche’s cow (that is to say, like his “last man”), unable to understand himself historically, and is thus consigned to the fatuous immaturity of a continuous present.¹⁷

Critical theory, as an avowedly historical form of philosophical and political practice, militates against any such unproblematic acquiescence to the present; it interrupts the seamlessness with which tradition informs the here and now. Likewise, “critical

¹⁵ Judith Butler, for example, notes that “Whether desire is habituated to pursue the good, as in Aristotle’s *Ethics*, or whether the charioteer in Plato’s *Phaedrus* has given freer rein to that more spiritual of horses, the vision of a thoroughly moral being has been one who passionately wants what is right.” Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 4.

¹⁶ Plato, for example, indicts “democratic man” because “he lives from day to day, indulging the pleasure of the moment. One day its wine, women, and song, the next water to drink and a strict diet . . . There’s no order or restraint in his life, and he reckons his way of living is pleasant, free, happy, and sticks to it through thick and thin.” Plato, *The Republic*, trans. by Desmond Lee (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 381.

¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” trans. by R. J. Hollingdale, in *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 60–61.

desire” is a desire encountered and interrogated as a specifically historical phenomenon, as a desire that hesitates before desire’s logic of uncritical completion. A critical theory that failed to interrogate its own animating desire would be irresponsible on at least two counts. First, it would fail to attend to how an unproblematicized notion of desire plays a fundamental role in reproducing the social and economic injustices at which critical theory takes aim. In particular, received understandings of desire naturalize the identities available to individuals within a given social milieu. To say it slightly differently, the alleged naturalness of desire is one of the most powerful tropes by which we justify ourselves to ourselves, and thus a “critical desire” aims to uncover the specific ways in which our understandings of desire depoliticize the question of who we are. Second, our interventionary and meta-political aspirations for a better world pursue a logic of completion that mirrors the commonplace understandings of sexual desire that continue to predominate in contemporary society. Confounding these different desires (for psychological and physiological satisfaction, for love, for social justice) played out at the different levels of the individual, the intersubjective, and the collective, returns us to a history that has witnessed fascist and totalitarian regimes turn people’s yearning for a better world into the matter of fact basis for genocide. Desire thus reveals itself as fundamental to the designs of critical theory (critical theory entails a desire to change the world), but its imperatives of fulfillment and their possible consequences are always calling even our most admirable liberatory gestures into question.

III. (Critical) Desire as Social Reproduction and Differentiation

This critique of desire explores the ideological function of desire within the traditionally capitalist and heterosexual/patriarchal hegemonies against which we are still struggling at the beginning of the new century. A critique of desire, an effort to explore what we mean when we say “desire,” might uncover the ways in which the concept of desire functions to reproduce the identities most readily available in contemporary social contexts. In doing so, such a critique offers a point of entry for contesting the “inevitable” patterns of social and political injustice at which a critical theory takes aim.

Such a critique, of course, is nothing new to Marxist-critical perspectives. As Marx suggests, the ideological justifications for laissez-faire capitalism offered by liberal political economists are based upon a naturalized notion of desire that distorts the relationship between the individual and economic-social forces. The liberals tended to argue that capitalist relations were produced by man’s natural evolution as a rational being who continuously seeks to fulfill his desires. This evolution, they contend, unfolded from the irreducible “desire” that distinguished man in the state of nature.¹⁸ Marx ridiculed this notion of a “state of nature” as a fiction; for him it is impossible to find some place where man might have existed anterior to his social existence. Marx argued that the behavior of the individual in the liberal fiction of the state of nature was actually the behavior of man *in*

¹⁸ For Hobbes, “the similitude of the passions,” the desire for what we want to have and the fear of what we want to avoid, are the motives of human action that necessitate his Commonwealth. C. B. Macpherson, echoing Marx’s general indictment of liberal theory, argues that Hobbes’ “conclusion about man’s competitive search for power,” and the desires that motivate this search, are “reached by way of generalizations about men in society . . .”. Hobbes, MacPherson argues, “was using a mental model of society which, whether he was conscious of this or not, corresponds only to a bourgeoisie market society.” Such a model necessitates Leviathan, for “If a society characterized by universal competition for power over others is to remain, for even the shortest length of time, a going society,” then there must be some form of legal authority that assures the peaceful transfer of power from one party to another. From the introduction to Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 38. See also Macpherson’s *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Lock*. (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1962).

capitalist society. The liberals were guilty of passing off the covetous behavior and self-understanding of individuals *produced by capitalism* as being the cause of capitalism.

This naturalized, and thus unthematized, notion of desire is fundamental to capitalism's uncanny ability to perpetually reproduce itself. The form of desire intrinsic to the basic logic of capital is inscribed in the self-understandings of individuals living and working within capitalist structures, constraining their understanding of the different social and political futures that they might otherwise participate in constructing. The desiring capitalist subject, confronted with a contingency outside of his immediate dominion, seeks to bring the object of his desire back within himself. Marx suggests that this dream of synthesis underlies the crucial role of desire in the operations of consumer capitalism. His analysis of commodity fetishism suggests that commodities promise themselves as condensations of the "relational" values from which capitalist man is alienated and to which he is drawn. Capitalism, in this scenario, carries itself on the backs of the alienation that it has generated. Deprived of meaning by capitalism, men and women constantly seek an illusory meaning in their/its products whose failure to provide that meaning ensures their next trip to the market. Addicts within an ad culture's constructed economy of meaning, we fetishists experience a moment of ecstatic discharge, which, however, only seems to intensify how hollow it all feels. As hooks suggests, this logic of displacement can entrap individuals in less than admirable social circumstances, sublimating their desire to change these circumstances. When "Witnessing the genocidal ravages of drug addiction in black families and communities," hooks begins "to 'hear' that longing for a substance as, in part, a displacement for the longed-for liberation—the freedom to control one's destiny."¹⁹

¹⁹ hooks, 12.

Desire, depicted as the biologically irreducible quality of trying to capture what one seeks, functions as the neutral ground that underpins the rhetorical justifications of capitalist relations, but it is also the “cement” that holds together reputedly natural heterosexual orders. Masculine power and the identities by which it is secured are enacted through a notion of desire that is naturalized within the “laws” of a heterosexual economy. As Judith Butler has noted, the stable, unified identities that mark out such an economy require a desire that is, itself, “heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender it desires.”²⁰ Within the tautological law of a heterosexual economy, therefore, the categories of sex, gender, and desire only have meaning in relation to one another. Here, desire is understood as that which “lacks, yearns, seeks, but is never capable of finding itself and its equilibrium” in itself, but which “enables the two sexes to be understood as (biological, sexual, social and psychological) complements of each other – each is presumed to complete, to fill up, the lack of the other.”²¹ Within this understanding of desire, different biological sexes give rise to different gendered marks and expressions that become the objects of a desiring subject and which reinforce common understandings of the social and economic roles available to different genders. Even when this economy is disrupted, a differentiating desire seems to draw this disruption back into the logic of its fold. When a homosexual, for example, defies the conventional sexual order, his or her (already the available pronouns do violence) models of authenticity and expressiveness are often already woven into the world of oppositional heterosexuality.²² Masculine and feminine self-understandings are therefore constituted, to a profound degree,

²⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), 22.

²¹ Elizabeth Grosz, “Refiguring Lesbian Desire,” in *Space, Time, and Perversion* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 177.

²² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 22.

by the ways in which one who finds oneself designated as male or female is taught to understand desire. Through long repetitions, males and females come to understand a particular conception of desire as a natural, inevitable and even essential part of who they are. Whatever else might change in the relationship between the sexes, it would seem that desire will remain a constant that underwrites the laws of that relationship, drawing a limit to the range of our political imaginations.

A lineage of thought, ranging in part from Nietzsche, through Foucault to Butler, suggests, however, that so much of what seems natural about desire and sexuality is actually socially constructed. If all of these thinkers have, at one time or another, granted desire a quasi-ontological status, they have all also alerted us that desire is always manifested in historically specific forms. Desire, as an ontological category, is never anterior to our ability to talk about it; desire is always already inflected with our understandings of economics, politics and ethics. Desire is therefore not merely a scientifically neutral description, it is also a political concept that might function as the site of an unexpected contestation. This contestation encourages us to look at the ways in which patriarchy (defined here as the multivalent, sometimes discontinuous system of effects that ensure and justify a male dominated political, economic, and social order) is entangled with, and dependent upon, an enforced heterosexuality. It forces us to think, in other words, about how the dominant models of desire available to males and females work to instantiate and to reinforce the identities and privileges of patriarchal power. By extension, such a contestation can work to develop a resource for interrupting the ways in which desire naturalizes our roles within capitalist economies.

Needless to say, the preceding sketch of the role played by desire in the reproduction of capitalist and patriarchal-heterosexual identity runs the risk of overstating the hold of these identities in our current socio-economic order. In fact, a more nuanced analysis would recognize that the identities made available by traditional patriarchal-heterosexual models have begun to fragment and to mutate under the technological-material pressures of late capitalism. We live, even more acutely than in Marx's time, in an age when "everything solid melts into air." Technological advances in communications, travel, biogenetics, reproduction, and warfare (to offer a partial list) have begun to transform our social world at a dizzying pace, and though these technological advances offer us newfound power over our lives, they do not come without costs. These advances, in ushering in a transition from an industrial, labor based economy to a high-tech, largely information based economy, have also begun to burst apart the social relations associated with industrial society.

As the ground of our self-understanding begins to shift under our feet, we are confronted by anxieties about our economic security, about the communities to which we belong, and about the spiritual meaning of our lives. As Michael Oakeshott reflects, "change is a threat to identity, and every change is an emblem of extinction." It is difficult to imagine living in a world in which we lacked some form of identity. In fact, a strong identity would seem more necessary than ever when inveighing against the chaotic, contingent tenor of modern life. This is why conservatives like Oakeshott would cultivate a studied, untimely resistance to the accelerated pace of change characteristic of modern life. Though we cannot merely retreat into our identities as if it were a "fortress," we can maintain some continuity in our lives "by throwing our weight upon the foot

which for the time being is most firmly placed, by cleaving to whatever familiarities are not immediately threatened ...".²³ Unfortunately, in a world in which change is inevitable, the impulse to cling to our familiar senses of who we are often hypertrophies, creating scenarios in which we project our resentment onto others because of our inability to preserve our always disintegrating identities.

William Connolly nicely explains a mechanism that links our resentment towards the “it was” with resentment against specific social others who threaten our social and economic status. The individual’s “resentment against finitude,” Connolly glosses, projects “a fundamental unfairness into being and then” resents “‘it’ for being unfair.”²⁴ This resentment is only exacerbated by the “finely grained network of institutionally imposed disciplines and requirements” that constitute the possibilities of our identity in late modernity. These identities, however, can only promise a highly contingent sense of security. As technologies advance, old standards of achievement become obsolete. Furthermore, any achievement itself creates new deviations for which one can be punished. Connolly argues that the “dependent uncertainty” fostered by the multiplication of disciplines in late modernity expresses itself in a “generalized resentment.”²⁵

²³ Michael Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative," in *Rationalism in Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 1962), 170 – 171.

²⁴ William E. Connolly, *Identity and Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 164.

²⁵ As Nietzsche makes clear in his indictment of Christian morality, this resentment is reciprocally linked to feelings of gratitude. If gratitude implies recent or ongoing vulnerability, then resentment expresses an embarrassment for the weakness that necessitates that gratitude. At the social level, “Those who experience themselves as penetrated too thoroughly by disciplinary powers and standards resent even the benefits that they receive.” Though this generalized resentment manifests itself in a range of behaviors, Connolly suggests that that it “receives its most revealing and politically active expression in the hostility of those in positions of official independence to the complaints of those in officially recognized conditions of dependence.” Connolly, *Identity and Difference*, 20 – 23.

The fragmentation of heterosexual identities, and the targeting of the feminist other to which this leads, offers a particularly powerful example of such a scenario. As Susan Faludi has persuasively argued, masculine reactions to the women's movement have coalesced, since contemporary feminism's rhetorical heyday in the early to mid 70s, into "a powerful counter-assault on women's rights, a backlash, an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women."²⁶ Such a backlash interprets the modest material gains made by the feminist movement as a threat to a received social order that promised men social status and economic security. By demanding more freedom and equality, so the argument goes, feminism has disrupted the reciprocal relationships that gave this order its coherence. As the economic prosperity enjoyed by the United States in the post-World War II era faces strains created by technological and global political transformations, and as the stable identities afforded by that prosperity have begun to fray, the efforts of women to win equal treatment have been singled out as a danger to entrenched notions of masculine identity. Thus, though men still retain a remarkably disproportionate amount of political, economic and institutional authority, they are often puzzled by the claim that they possess any inordinate access to power.²⁷ Already buffeted about by the sometimes erratic flows of global capitalism, long ago deprived of the metaphysical certainty of a God-ordered world, many men see feminism as yet another attack on what little power they have left over their own lives. The feminist demand for equality, in other words, is often

²⁶ Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1991), xviii, and *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: Morrow, 1999).

²⁷ Michael S. Kimmel, "Men and Women's Studies: Premises, Perils, and Promise," in *Talking Gender*, Hewitt ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 161.

interpreted by men as an attack on their own coherence and their own sense of self-worth. These men, as Michael Kimmel has noted, do not feel powerful.²⁸

The analyses pursued in this dissertation do not ignore the power of identity in conserving a coherent self-understanding of ourselves, or of the deep-seated psychological appeal of the security afforded by such identities. Rather than outrightly dismissing the inevitable, often positive role that identity plays in constituting our understanding of the world, this dissertation takes the productive power of identity as its point of departure. Moving from the quasi-ontological claim that identity-recognition is a necessary moment of a practically effective cognitive life, a critical politics cannot ignore the necessity of identity for a successful interventionary politics. For those who have been denied their full humanity, the cultivation of an identity is a necessary moment in overcoming their invisibility.²⁹ Blacks, in their efforts to win equality in a racist, white society, need the psychical and tactical-political coherence afforded by the notion of a “black identity.” Women, likewise, need some organizing set of principles or interests in order to become politically efficacious. That being the case, a thorough going engagement with the question of identity also points to its costs. We can summarize these costs by noting that all identities, as epistemic and pragmatic necessities, are fashioned through processes of exclusion. A mature engagement with the necessity of identity both accepts the inevitability of identity and attends to the injustices and exclusions that must be practiced in its name.

Beyond being ethically admirable, such an engagement would be more mature because it would recognize that the longing for the security and coherence provided by

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Edward W. Said, “The Politics of Knowledge,” in *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature*, ed. by David H. Richter (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994), 196-97.

any identity is always under assault, doomed to fragment and pass away into some other form. Even the conservative's "familiar presents" are always already corrupted by the understanding of desire by which they are constituted. The conservative, seated on a front porch, nurturing his feeling of connection to the world, is not enraptured by a static scene that can be contemplated from some detached perspective. Rather, this enthralling "present" gains its power from a desire that ruptures the presence of this present. We cleave to what we cleave not because of its permanence, but because of its familiar entanglement with a movement outside of itself:

Is there no change of death in paradise?
Does ripe fruit never fall there? Or do the boughs
Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,
With rivers like our own that seek for seas
They never find, the same receding shores
That never touch with inarticulate pang?³⁰

Even the most idealized present, paradise itself, could only be paradise, that which we value most highly, via its participation with its own passing. Thus "desire," though a powerful rhetorical force that seems almost constitutive of our received identities, also turns out to be a force that threatens those identities, that begins to call into question our allegiance to who we might otherwise insist we are. We might say that it marks, in the movement that it tentatively stands in for, an absence that infiltrates those powerful moments of presence for which we yearn. "Desire" discloses its own power in ways that work back against the moment of consummation that it seems to demand.

So when we begin to critically examine the capitalist and patriarchal forms of desire that play such a profound role in constituting who we are, we soon discover that it

³⁰ Wallace Stevens, "Sunday Morning," in *The Palm at the End of the Mind*, ed. by Holly Stevens (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 7.

is a polyvocal term, one whose different connotations reveal contradictions and paradoxes buried within its usage. Connolly's definition of desire draws our attention to some of these tensions. Connolly defines desire as the experiential force of "an organization of energy" that manifests itself within a wide range of possible effects; it is that which motivates us "to possess, caress, love, emulate, help, befriend, defeat, stymie, boss, fuck, kill, or injure other human beings, both as individuals and as types."³¹

Though Connolly insists that desire remains "too protean, multiple, contingent, and promiscuous" to be fully theorized, his preliminary typology uncovers both a positive and a negative pole to the ways that we use the term. Connolly, no doubt, means to shock us by letting "fuck" slip into an academic treatise, but he is not using the word gratuitously. Rather, he is using the term tactically, hoping to solicit our complacent understanding of desire.³² "Fuck" sutures the two poles of his typology to one another, marking a disjuncture (a space of incommensurability) that at the same time joins the term's expected range of meanings together. It points to how our description of perhaps our most intimate, most immediate, most liberating encounter with another human being is shot through with an unsavory will to dominate. "Fuck" not only refers to making love, it also carries the sense of having won a battle, of having put the other in their proper place, as in "ahhh ... I really fucked him/her over," or "I fucked him up."

The contradictions within the word "desire" takes us places. A word of care, but also a word of war. A word of ecstatic escape, but also a word of conquest. "Desire" offers itself as a site of contestation that allows the critical theorist to challenge capitalist

³¹ William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 49.

³² "It is the domination of beings that difference everywhere comes to solicit, in the sense that *solicitare*, in old Latin, means to shake as a whole, to make tremble in entirety." Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, Trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 21. See also Bass's note on page 16.

ideology's monotonous appeal to "human nature," and it is a resource by which feminism unsettles the ways in which patriarchy is made to seem more natural, less assailable, by the laws of "heterosexual desire." Thought of as a ruse of power, rather than a natural fact, desire can be complicated in ways that would open up our thinking of desire; our thinking of desire can be deflected in ways that suggest the possibility of alternative, as yet unarticulated, models of desire.

The trope of desire, therefore, does more than offer a site around which one might organize a critique of unjust social practices. It also engages us in the possibility of affirmations that are not beholden to some final notion of metaphysical or ontological closure. The kind of affirmation that it encourages explicitly opposes itself to the kinds of affirmation that are characteristic of desire understood in terms of capture and absorption. Even from within the capitalist, patriarchal and heterosexual systems in which it is articulated, the thought of desire points beyond the provincial visions of capitalism, patriarchy and heterosexuality. Desire carries us toward an encounter with that which is "other" to our thought, our experience.³³ This is why desire, despite the ways in which "it" is essential to the reproduction of patriarchal/heterosexual and capitalist economies, is also central to overcoming those received social identities. To put "desire" to work in this way resonates with what Jeff Nealon has said about using "anger" as the lens for his investigation of a white male politics of resentment. Though it might seem more appropriate "to perform another mode of comportment toward the

³³ Levinas complicates Husserl's phenomenological notion of intentionality by suggesting "a *desire* outside of the simple consciousness of ... It is still an intention, but intention in a sense radically different from the theoretical aim, and the practice that theory involves. Intention is now taken as desire, such that intention, occurring between deception and *Effullung*, already reduces the "objectifying act" to a specification of a tendency, rather than hunger being a particular consciousness of ...". It is important to note that the ellipses are Levinas's. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, Trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 66.

other,” Nealon argues that “anger” has the advantage of being able to “produce a response that is more than a repetition of the same: anger is perhaps another of the myriad names for a movement outside the self that does not merely return to the self.”³⁴ Desire, in at least some dimensions of its polyvocality, is also one of these names. It is one of those names that not only helps us locate where we are by calling attention to its role in reproducing our subject positions within overarching systems of power; it also puts us in motion on the road to *becoming* who we are, initiating an interrogation of our destinations and our dreams of some final resting place. The desire to understand and to grasp desire, and the failure encoded in the very definition of desire, leads one to rethink desire, and, it may be possible, to explore the ways in which this desire leads outside itself.

We might explore this double imperative of “critical desire” by tracing out its movement in a particular, exemplary context. How might a male, for example, who always already understands himself in the context of masculine desire, question this desire in a way that would challenge his received understandings of women and his relationship to them? The response to this question lies at the heart of this dissertation, and lends to it its exemplary value as a form of political practice at the level of theory. This encounter, between a male, heterosexual author, and a feminist constituency that he would approach, marks the specificity of its effort to craft a more mature critical theory. It is at the very difference that is marked by this encounter that such a theory is beginning to take shape.³⁵

³⁴ Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 143.

³⁵ The metatheoretical implications of this claim will be more fully developed in chapter 5 below, “Heterotopian Feminism and the Space of the Meta-political.”

The journey that I am beginning to trace here (the encounter with difference, the process of becoming different) evokes a kinship with the protagonist of that great American novel of ethical encounter and maturation, *Huck Finn* (or at least with the self-consciousness with which his story can/must now be read). Like Huck, the narrative voice that speaks here also becomes captivated by the idea that things might be different; both follow out an arc of their desire. And like Huck, he (the narrator) arrives on the scene as the product of a dominant economic, social, and political group, one that has traditionally exercised its power over the group that the narrator hopes to engage. Both Huck and the narrator raise the question of how an encounter between a dominant group and a group that it oppresses might occur. How might the relationship between man and woman, between white and black, become something other than one of assimilation, domination and/or exploitation? What would that transformation look like? How would the colonizer ever begin to think of himself differently – differently from the ways prescribed by his or her received ideology? How can the colonized begin to discard the learned subservience that is continually reproduced in the slave-master relationship?

Whatever else might occur in this space of transformation, both *Huck Finn* and this dissertation assert that it is necessary to *go through who one is* on the road to becoming other. In order to detail the experience of overcoming of racism or sexism, it is imperative, it seems, to set down within the midst of that racist or sexist experience. Within the context of the novel's ante-bellum South, Toni Morrison observes, there would be no way for "Huck to mature into a moral human being in America without Jim, and therefore that to let Jim go free, to let him *not* miss the mouth of the Ohio River and

passage into free territory, would be to abandon the whole premise of the book.”³⁶ Huck is unable to even tentatively articulate freedom without “the absolute power over the life of another” signified by slavery. And while one cannot doubt the genuine offense that the portrayal of Jim can cause African-Americans, efforts to banish the novel from our national consciousness miss the important process with which the novel wrestles. Such an effort misses the chance to raise the question of how the transformation of our racist (or sexist, or homophobic) self-understandings might begin to take place. By attending to this transformation, a notion of freedom might emerge that is not dependent on the marginalization and denial of the other, but which instead turns on difference understood as a moment of affirmation.

Hopefully, a similar form of contestation, and the cultivation of a similar kind of ethos, can be put into play by this dissertation’s effort to speak to feminism. Quite consciously, therefore, I have tried to avoid the lure of speaking from nowhere.³⁷ Rather, this dissertation is meant to thematize and complicate the places from which its author speaks. When men pause to think about their encounters with women, and about their encounters with feminism, they are unsettled; they are, in this thinking hesitation, strangers – to themselves and to the women to whom they turn. This dissertation explores how the strangeness of such encounters, and the discomfort that they engender, calls men to interrogate themselves and the dreams of mastery upon which their self-understanding depends.

³⁶ Toni Morrison, “Black Matter(s)”, in *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature*, ed. by David H. Richter (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994), 266.

³⁷ The reference is from Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*. I first encountered it in Charles Taylor’s article *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. by Charles Guignon (Boston: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 318.

This particular encounter could have an exemplary value for our vision of a more progressively democratic future; it articulates an ethos of encounter, a meditation on the tenor and tempo of encounter, which allows us to imagine the substantive content of that future without locking it into place. To write from within the space of becoming-other enacts a “tactical” attitude that actors ensconced in a variety of subject positions might find useful. Impelled by what Michel Foucault has called our “impatience for freedom,” we politicize ourselves when we test those limits that mark the bounds of our psychic coherence.³⁸

In order to focus thinking through identity as being constituted by the movement of its own overcoming, I turn, in a highly selective way, to how the nexus between identity and desire has centrally informed philosophical reflection on thinking since the 19th century. Perhaps most obviously, the paradoxical moments within desire and the desire of thought that I am beginning to explore are central to Hegel’s philosophical project, and any effort to theorize a dynamic, temporally mediated understanding of identity in terms of desire would have to at least glance at his thought. In fact, “critical desire” might be articulated by considering competing interpretations of how desire functions within his thinking. Hegel’s thought is drawn onward by its desire; it enacts a journey of self-reckoning that brings it into a confrontation with the other of its thought. But, as is well known, the Hegelian dialectic threatens any form of thought that remains outside of its immediate dominion. A fairly common (if overly simplistic) reading of

³⁸ For a clear articulation of this “limit attitude,” see Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” in *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: The New York Press, 1994), 315 – 19. I have demonstrated how this attitude can be seen as an extension of Nietzsche’s notion of “mnemotechnics” in “The Theory of Communicative Action and the Aesthetic Moment,” paper presented at the 1997 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association.

Hegel depicts the Hegelian dialectic being jumpstarted by a desire that draws the thinking subject outside of itself and toward that which is the other of its thought in a movement in which the subject reconciles this outside with itself. The other encountered within the Hegelian dialectic, according to this kind of reading, is always reduced to the same, ensuring that the structured movement of the rational is always in accord with the real. Kathy Ferguson, for example, contends that the Hegelian notion of desire, read in these terms, is never innocent:

The kinds of desires Hegel attributes to his subject are instructive: desire for the consumption and control of nature; desire for recognition via domination; desire for the other's desire. The kind of person who could have these desires turns out to be characteristically modern, western, and male: an intersubjectively impoverished individual locked into a variety of combative stances, seeking dominance in relationships, mastery over nature, and absorption of difference.³⁹

Hegelian desire, on this account, directs an ongoing violence toward the other; instead of relating to the other, the man caught up in a Hegelian desire turns the other into what he wants it to be.

There can be little doubt that the Hegelian notion of dialectic has, particularly as it has been appropriated by various Enlightenment orthodoxies (such as the orthodox Marxisms of the former Soviet Union), been rendered in the way that Ferguson describes. As Mouffe and Laclau have noted, Hegel “represents the highest point of rationalism: the moment when it attempts to embrace within the field of reason, without dualisms, the

³⁹ Kathy Ferguson, *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

totality of the universe of differences.”⁴⁰ It is this moment within Hegel’s thought that has led post-modern critics such as Deleuze to portray Hegel as a thinker who systematically works to eliminate the troubling possibility of a difference that subjective thought cannot contain.⁴¹

If, however, we take seriously an ethic of reading that would resist the assimilating movement that some post-modern thinkers have uncovered in Hegel, we need to hesitate before any such “postmodern,” Nietzschean indictment of Hegel. For Hegel’s thought, read differently, also bears witness to the impossibility of its own completion. The synthesis enacted in the Hegelian dialectic also “contains all the seeds of its dissolution, as the rationality of history can be affirmed only at the price of introducing contradiction into the field of reason.”⁴² Hegel’s thought, to the degree that it tracks an always ongoing process of contradiction, is an “impossible operation” that subverts any simple, static notion of identity. Rather, it offers us a notion of identity that “is constituted as transition, relation, difference.”⁴³ As Judith Butler puts it, “the Hegelian subject is not a self-identical subject who travels smugly from one ontological place to another; it *is* its travels, and *is* every place in which it finds itself.”⁴⁴ Thus though Hegelian desire is constitutive of subjectivity to the degree that the fulfillment of that desire is an inescapable pull from which a subjectivity cannot escape, it is also the case that “desire’s dissatisfaction” with any particular space or moment occupied by a

⁴⁰ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Practice: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (New York: Verso, 1985), 95.

⁴¹ “There is no possible compromise between Hegel and Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s philosophy has a great polemical range; it forms an absolute anti-dialectics and sets out to expose all the mystifications that find a final refuge in the dialectic.” Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 195.

⁴² Mouffe and Laclau, 95.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 8.

subjectivity “always signifies ontological rupture and insurpassability of external difference.”⁴⁵

Whether Mouffe and Laclau, or Butler, get Hegel right or not is less interesting than the “ontological” and normative commitments that seem implicit in their readings of Hegelian thought and desire. In its effort to thematize the possibility of a solidarity that arises out of difference rather than assimilation, this dissertation will thematize the second of these interpretations of the movement of the desire of the Hegelian dialectic. Or to put it more precisely, in order to focus on desire’s perpetual movement of differentiation this dissertation will work through Nietzsche instead of Hegel.⁴⁶ That choice is somewhat a matter of familiarity, but it is, in any case, somewhat warranted by the degree to which problematics of desire, of self and other, thematized by Nietzsche draw his thinking into an unexpected proximity with Hegelian themes. An irony of Nietzschean inspired criticisms of Hegel, in fact, is that the tenor of these criticisms now resonates in our interpretations of Hegel, freeing his thought from the assimilating movement of enclosure that gives his thought its “offensive odor.” Thus, though a certain reading of Hegel will shadow our narrative, we will privilege Nietzsche’s

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ In doing so, I am at least implicitly leaning on taxonomy sketched out by Elizabeth Grosz. Grosz argues that, “broadly speaking,” there are, throughout the history of western philosophy, “two conceptions of desire” that map on to “two broad understandings of the body.” The traditional understanding of desire, one preserved by Plato, Hegel, Freud and Lacan, is a negative conception of desire. All of these thinkers understand “desire as a yearning for what is lost, absent, or impossible.” This dissertation, it might be said, seeks to critique the unproblematic but highly effective role played by negative desire in the reproduction of power relations at various sites of contestation: between men and women, between races, between oppositional voices within the academic left, between those who have and those who don’t. This tradition is opposed by a positive conception of desire articulated by Spinoza, Nietzsche, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari. In this conception, “desire is seen as a positivity or mode of fullness which produces, transforms and engages directly with reality.” Rather than “seeing desire as a lack,” this conceptualization “sees it as a form of production, including self-production, a process of making or becoming.” Elizabeth Grosz, “The Stomach for Knowledge,” in *Nietzsche, Feminism and Political Theory* (St. Leonards, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1993), 69. Rather, however, than privilege either of these dimensions, I am interested in their entanglement, and particularly with the ways in which the force of “positive desire” differentiates the constructions of “negative desire.”

affirmation of difference rather than the Hegelian notion of negativity. Nietzsche's thought, as we will suggest in tracing the unique place of "woman" and women in his philosophy and life, more forcefully highlights the value of that which is necessarily alterior to our thought. There is some allegiance here, then, with Kelly Oliver's observation, that "In *On the Genealogy of Morals*," Nietzsche "sets out an alternative to the Hegelian lordship/bondage relation in which all value is determined in relation to a hostile outside world; he suggests a way of valuing that is not hostile to everything different from itself, but is tolerant of difference."⁴⁷

Following this reading of Nietzsche, my project enacts a contestation of the traditional models of desire, sketched out above, that dominate the western philosophical tradition and which play such an important, though often unacknowledged, role in marking out the possibilities of our social interactions. The emphasis in what follows, then, will not be on reconciliation, either with ourselves or with or amongst the women who have just interrupted *us*. We worry too much about what reconciliation might encode. Rather, this dissertation will, to make use of Donna Haraway's "invented category of semantics," track the ways in which our encounter with women *diffracts* the future of our encounters, opening up a difference which our calculations cannot yet articulate.⁴⁸

IV. Overview

Having laid out this thematic framework in chapter one, the notion of "critical desire" and its importance for critical theory is fleshed out throughout the remainder of my

⁴⁷ Kelly Oliver, *Womanizing Nietzsche*, x, see also, Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*.

⁴⁸ Donna J. Haraway. *Modest Witness@Second Millenium. FemaleMan@_Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 16.

dissertation. The next chapter focuses on how desire functions in the work and life of Friedrich Nietzsche. His comparison of “truth” and “woman” suggests a movement of desire that interrupts its own completion, revealing in the unproblematicized consummation of our desires (for the truth, for sexual satisfaction, for commodity gratification, etc.) a certain vulgarity. By tracing out the role that desire plays in his thought, and in looking at how certain forms of this Nietzschean desire are taken up by Nietzsche’s intellectual heirs (most particularly by Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, and Butler), we can imagine “desire” as being something other than a movement of closure, assimilation, and consummation. We argue that this alternative understanding of desire captures an important dimension of the liberatory practice of critical theory.

We recognize, however, that this notion of desire also carries its own dangers. In particular, we are concerned with how the logic of differentiation inherent in this form of desire has parallels with the movement of de- and re-territorialization that characterizes modern forms of consumer capitalism.

Furthermore, we are suspicious of the relationship to otherness that emerges out of this logic. We applaud the general tenor of this relationship as it emerges in Nietzschean inspired post-structuralist thought; his suggestions about the obstinacy of the “other” alerts us to the tendency of any economy of thought to reduce experience to its terms, in part by excluding this “other” from its thinking as an assumption whose “truth” is no longer contestable. But one wonders if the constant deferment of woman isn’t, for Nietzsche, a way of maintaining *his* truth, a way of allowing him to maintain his monologue about a truth that is always sought but which is never attained. If that’s the case, it seems like the de-territorialization of his thought merely serves to maintain the

abstraction of an exchange. “Woman” remains subordinated, in Nietzsche’s thought, as a purely abstract difference that can be exchanged between men. This distance maintains the abstract power of “woman” *for* man.

Chapter three begins our exploration of the way in which we can begin to negotiate these Nietzschean dangers within critical theory. In order to successfully draw Nietzsche’s thought into critical theory, we turn to the French feminist thinker Luce Irigaray’s amorous contestation of Nietzsche’s work. Irigaray draws Nietzsche into a conversation that draws out the more radical implications of a thought that is premised on an insuperable difference. When Nietzsche’s logic of otherness is rigorously brought into conversation with the question of sexual difference from which it gets its bearings, Nietzsche’s misogyny undergoes a transformation that allows *women* to exist in *their* difference from men. Irigaray posits this moment of irreducible difference as a prerequisite for any meaningful conversation between the sexes. Thus Irigaray, by challenging Nietzsche’s articulation of an economy of difference, actually opens Nietzsche’s thought towards a reimagination of solidarity, community, friendship and love in ways that would not entail reducing the other to the same, of turning the other into who we want them to be.

Chapter four takes up these questions of solidarity by exploring how these modified Nietzschean resources have actually been taken up by a certain strand of “post-identitarian” feminist thought, particularly as it has been formulated by Judith Butler and Donna Haraway. These thinkers utilize Nietzschean strategies to effectively criticize a naïve insistence on a feminist identity, but they do so in ways that effectively negotiate the tensions between the influences of “Nietzsche” and “Marx.” In order to more clearly

sketch out the status of this limit, we follow how Nietzsche's influence has infiltrated Nancy Hartsock's marxist inspired stand-point theory. Articulating this seam within feminism can go a long way towards demonstrating the possibility (and felicity) of drawing together both Nietzschean, post-modern approaches and more specifically marxist perspectives across the entire spectrum of contemporary critical theory. This is not meant to suggest a synthesis of these approaches; rather, this articulation is meant to preserve a productive agonism between them. And, it is hoped, it justifies the Nietzschean interrogation of identity that now resonates in critical theory, because it suggests that the way in which we work on becoming other, and the politics of its achievement, is never distinct from the tenor of the politics at which we aim. Some will complain that the interrogation of solidarity is untimely, that it is premature to worry about post-patriarchal, post-capitalist comportment, but the end of a politics is already at stake in the articulation of its transformative ethos. Nietzsche has provided, through the recent work of William Connolly and others, an admirably conceived contestatory, agonal tempo to this interrogative, transformative ethos. As Nietzsche's work has traveled through the work of different feminist authors, it has also begun to suggest an alternative tempo for this ethos, one which values the hesitation in which the voice of the other might come to speak.

Finally, chapter five explores how the feminism sketched out in chapter four "operates" within the architectonic, meta-political forms of contemporary critical and democratic theory. We want to see how such a feminism always disrupts, in the specificity of its otherness, and in its focus on materiality and corporeality, the consensus that underwrites both Rawls's and Habermas's schematics for a democratically governed

society. Without such disruptions, their sketch of a more democratic society, we worry, always runs the risk of excluding concrete, embodied others from the public forms of political participation at which these theories putatively aim.

Chapter 2: Nietzschean Intimations of “Critical Desire”

I. Revolutionary Subjects

A critical theory of politics – that is, the effort to theorize a politics organized around emancipatory interests – cannot dismiss the conservative concern about the authoritarian (even if unanticipated) consequences of its aims. In fact, the question of how to force open and transform the sedimented identities of the status quo without reproducing their basic structure is not merely a problem associated with total revolution: it is a central danger for all critical, interventionary political projects. As the experience of contemporary brands of religious, feminist, ethnic-national, anti-racist, and queer politics demonstrate, the political-psychical motivations for a coherent identity are bound-up with unavoidable fundamentalizing presuppositions.⁴⁹ The pluralizing force of these movements is intertwined with an exclusionary logic that marks the limit of these groups’ emancipatory potential.

The limits and dangers of identity raise important questions for the critical theorist because identity seems to be a necessary moment in the life histories of marginalized groups seeking to intervene in the reproduction of political and social life. These political groups need to cultivate their identities in order to foster solidarity and to animate their constituencies, to create both for themselves and others a sense that their cause is salient, and to take advantage of their social and electoral power. These capacities are particularly important for groups who have been denied identity and who are trying to break into the political arena. Edward Said points, for example, to the historical and tactical necessity of *négritude* in a context where “blacks had once been stigmatized and given inferior status to

⁴⁹ William Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

whites...” In such circumstances, *négritude* was necessary for affirming blackness rather than “aspiring to whiteness.”⁵⁰ Though Said is quite clear that the an ongoing recourse to such identities eventually squanders the emancipatory promise that impelled these identities in the first place, he recognizes that identity is a crucial moment in the liberatory struggle of an oppressed group. It is only when the oppressed gain their voice that they are able to move on to “the real work, the hard work,” and begin to participate in the task of “the reintegration of all those people and cultures, once confined and reduced to peripheral status, with the rest of the human race.”⁵¹

The critical theorist must also reckon with the long recognized ways in which group identity is intractable from individual identities. From Plato to Rousseau, from Marx and Nietzsche to contemporary feminist and queer thinkers, political theorists have recognized that refashioning the political world that we inhabit entails refashioning the kinds of people that inhabit this world. Furthermore, for insurgent groups, linking group identity to individual identity maintains the enthusiasm for the movement against the typically hostile environment in which they proceed. Unfortunately, the need and desire to refashion human nature implies the acceptability of force, even violence, in order to create a “new man.” The examples of totalitarian efforts to create this new man remind us of the distance that interventionary groups and governments will go in an effort to create and maintain this proper revolutionary spirit.

Both of these *necessary* moments of identity in interventionary struggle begin a border operation that would maintain these identities over time, enshrining the exclusions

⁵⁰ Edward Said, “The Politics of Knowledge,” in *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994), 197.

⁵¹ Said, 198.

that have given them their coherence. The very identity that is necessary for successful political intervention is, therefore, ensnared within a logic that threatens to drain the interventionary subject of his/her/its emancipatory lifeblood. For any emancipatory, interventionary politics, the identitarian means used to effect the transformations at which it aims have a dangerous habit of overtaking and becoming the end-all of these aims.

It is this “logic of emancipatory intervention” that focuses our effort to find a voice for contemporary critical theory, turning it, within the politics of its time, towards an interrogation of *its own constitutive desire* for a more admirable alternative to present socio-political realities. Such an interrogation sustains the tension between the necessity of identity and its inherent dangers by drawing our attention to the *aporias* of self-reference that are endemic to all critical political projects. The critical theorist reproduces this self-referential problem at the level of a political-epistemological event in attending to how his own desire for a better world is itself nourished by the world in which he has learned to “desire.” He evaluates a social world, but he himself (sic) is produced in such a world. He or she is either a member of another society, bringing in some ways the interpretive habits of that society, or he/she inhabits the society that he/she critiques, or he/she fashions himself/herself as an internal or external exile from the society that he/she aims to rehabilitate.

Whatever epistemic position the critical theorist finds him or herself in, he or she can better thematize the threat to a critical theory’s emancipatory promise by more carefully considering its own animating desire. The desires for the truth; for justice, in the here and now; for sexual, pleasurable, ethical contact with other human beings; for another world: all of these cravings seem central to a coherent leftist politics, but given how these

desires are formed within and constitutive of *this* world, will they ever allow us anything but the perpetual reproduction of *this* world? If critical theory can be defined as a critique of the political and social world that implies the effort to more admirably configure that world, then critical theory is always a matter of desire. The structure of this desire, configured for so long now in the west as a movement of consummation, draws our attention to the ways in which critical-theoretical projects find themselves defined – empowered and ensnared – by their revolutionary impulse.

We (that is the “we” of critical theory that is being articulated in these pages) want to change the world, and that concern entangles our approach with a means-ends calculation. Our yearning for social justice turns our attention to the question of *how* we should go about effecting this transformation: how can we be effective? What are the proper tactics that will allow us to change the world? And yet, within a *critical* theory of politics, the recognition of these tactical realities can never override or be held distinct from the ongoing critique of the identities through which we gain our political coherence. Thus the second question that the critical theorist always asks is: in what ways do the means with which we pursue our vision of a more just future affect the ends at which we arrive? In the course of this narrative we will try to work out an ethos of political engagement that always proceeds with these questions of tactics and normative forbearance in mind, but we can tentatively say that the thought that emerges here offers us alternative strategies for thinking through the tactical necessity of identity, particularly at those points where identity is currently organized around unproblematicized but highly functional notions of desire.

Critical theory cannot, it seems, abandon its animating desire; it is constituted by its desire to transform the world. Critical theory can, however, take up the question of this desire in a critical-practical fashion. It can become more attuned to thinking that the *telos* of desire – that is, the truth of *our* desire – is historically specific, and that though we inhabit and are ineluctably inhabited by this desire, we can imagine strategies for interrupting its unproblematic reproduction. This is not to say that “desire” is unitary in the social, political, economic and interpersonal contexts in which “it” is manifested. This “desire” that we critique has, we would however argue, an epochal significance – “it,” as a repeated trope (that in its physiological and inscribed dimensions is “more” than a trope. It is, like all linguistic practice, semio-material) ideal-typically cordons off a structure of “desire,” the consistency of its movement, which we subject to a testing, to an experiment. This approximation of “desire” as it manifests itself in late-modern global contexts, turns out not only to be a fundamental component of capitalist, patriarchal, and heterosexist discourse, it is also constitutive of socialist, feminist, and environmentalist self-understandings as well. The task of this critique of “desire,” then, remains two-fold. On the one hand, this critique aims to solicit, or to shake, this notion of “desire” and to separate it from, forcing a space between, “it” and the discourses of power with which it is ideologically imbricated. We also seek, however, an affirmative rearticulation of “desire” that resists the dangers of our traditional desire’s will to consolidate identity. We seek an affirmative notion of “desire” that responds to the affective fullness of experience that we crave. Our affirmation, however, at the same time problematizes any notion of finality or unmediated presence that might unfold from that craving. What would we call this new formation? If we still call it “desire,” “it’s” meaning would have

been transformed. In the spaces of our “desire’s” interruptions we might become more attuned to marginalized experiences of desire that themselves fracture the assimilating certainty of culturally dominant forms of desire, but those desires are themselves subject to the ongoing critique promised by the practice of “critical desire.”

The practice of this “critical desire,” like the practice of critical theory in general, always proceeds as both a diagnostic and an affirming activity. The moment of diagnoses is indispensable for any interventionary politics; it allows that politics to gain its tactical and strategic bearings. Particularly because all of us (but some of us more than others) always already understand ourselves within received patterns of meaning (that is, we perceive ourselves as a reaction), it is important for a critical politics to *cultivate a curiosity* about the “here” in which it is practiced. To think about getting to a “there,” we have to think about the “here” from which we proceed. We have to get into the “here” and look at the specific limits that comprise the boundaries of our self-understandings so that it might be possible to think the possible transformations that might occur within (at the time of) a certain milieu. This activity itself is, of course, a mode, or a manifestation, of “desire.” It seeks the attainment of a “there” that glimmers ahead as a world that we would bring into being.

“Critical desire,” therefore, is caught up in the movement of desire that it critiques; it at least begins there (where else could it begin?). It traces itself within actual practices and habits of language and thus within the conventionally held understandings of desire that circulate within the discursive practices of a given society (or within the economy of a thinker’s thought). It is this close tracing that, in part, makes “critical desire” an indispensable and unique tool for critical theory. “Critical desire,” though it is

being presented here from a synoptic perspective, is at least initially about how one might *begin to think critically and practically* from *within* a social environment. “Critical desire” works within the patterned movement of a desire (and within its variations) that, iterated across an array of contexts, has achieved paradigmatic status in the West.

Working on the assumption that, within a certain historical period, a general economy of desire functions in analogously similar ways along various dimensions of our experience, we join with a current within critical theory that has sought to elucidate this desire, to draw out the relationships amongst its differing dimensions.⁵² In particular, these efforts have sought to clarify the ways in which our understanding of our corporeal, biological desire is always mediated by, and imbricated with, the discursive practices in which that understanding arises. According to the general thrust of these critiques, our concept of “desire” is part of the soil that makes *our* thinking possible. To say it slightly differently, our thinking is constituted and sustained by the grammatical form that our thinking gives to “desire,” that “desire” gives to thinking. To think, throughout much of our history, has meant to think towards, to desire, a certain end – the truth. Giving “desire” this kind of reach, of course, is exactly what ensnares the theorist within a general paradox that faces the practice of a “critical desire”: he or

⁵² Though a useful way of gaining (an imposed) clarity about this desire is to distinguish different desires based on their aim, we are more interested in preserving the thrall of “desire” as our “darkling aspiration,” as a placeholder, across different contexts, for our movement towards the things that we want. We suspect, in any case, that desire maintains this density within and across any such set of analytic distinctions; it is, in relationship to any analytic matrix, an irreducible, unassailable assumption whose basic structural configuration goes unchallenged by most classificatory schemes. As such, our social (economic, political and cultural) desires and our personal (biological-psychical, sexual) desires tend to be, in any given milieu, configured similarly, acting both literally and metaphorically in shaping who we are. We assume, therefore, that following desire’s transversal path across different analytical domains, participating in the pleasures of the boundary confusions between the personal and the social that it sets in motion, can allow us to productively isolate a certain set of questions revolving around the problematic of desire.

she, as a product of the time in which he or she writes, is in large part produced by the desire that he or she now turns to critique. The desire to critique desire, according to this logic, cannot be neatly distinguished from the desire being critiqued. The desire to critique desire, therefore, carries with it an assumption – one might call it a metaphysical assumption – that remains beyond critique, thus allying critique with a certain preconception, a certain faith, in the truth. For the critical theorist, this problem of ascertaining the “truth” when one has been produced by that “truth” is more than a neat philosophical problem, it strikes at his or her very ability to counter the reproduction of social reality against which he or she militates.

This problem of self-referentiality, and the recoiling kind of critique that it implicitly necessitates, is part of the seductive appeal that Nietzsche’s thought holds for contemporary critical theory. One of the great merits of his thought is the degree to which he recognizes his own entanglement in different binding structures, such as the metaphysical presuppositions that his thinking so relentlessly critiques. Nietzsche locates himself within a “we” who, despite their professions of a godless anti-metaphysics, remain “pious.”⁵³ He recognizes, foreshadowing Popper, that science does not abide “convictions”; for a formulation to be considered scientific, it must “descend to the modesty of hypotheses, of a provisional experimental point of view.” This skepticism about the final truth of any proposition is itself, Nietzsche points out, underwritten by a faith in truth itself. Without such a faith, science would be unable to get off the ground; it would be pursuing, that is, something quite different than what it, by its

⁵³ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 280.

own definition, purports to want.⁵⁴ As such, science is merely the latest manifestation of the ascetic ideal; it still desires.

By situating himself within the paradox that colors even our most rigorous thinking, Nietzsche sets thought on the path of its own overcoming. For though Nietzsche dreams of articulating a thought that operates outside of this doubting metaphysical self-referentiality, there may be no formal escape from the general aporiatic structure that he diagnoses. It is, in fact, Nietzsche's effort to rethink freedom, not as an escape, but as an affirmation of the contingencies and flux in which we operate and in whose "finalities" we are ensconced, that opens the structures of meaning with which we cement our world together, creating the possibility of another kind of thinking and feeling. It is the "feeling" of Nietzsche's intuition of the eternal return,⁵⁵ a moment that throws us into the here and now, detailing the stickiness of our subjectivity, but in so doing implying the (tragic⁵⁶) affirmation of the ongoing play of differentiating forces.

The struggle for self-knowledge is a struggle with "desire." In one sense, this is analogically true; we pursue the truth of ourselves: we pursue others that we physically desire. In another sense, though, we have increasingly come to

⁵⁴ Nietzsche recognizes that he, as one of those who prepare the way for the overman, remains faithful to an idea of the truth; we might say that he still desires the truth: "No doubt, those who are truthful in that audacious and ultimate sense that is presupposed by the faith in science *thus affirm another world* than the world of life, nature, and history; and insofar as they affirm this "other world" – look, must they not by the same token negate its counterpart, this world, *our world?* – But you will have gathered what I am driving at, namely, that it is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests – that even we seekers of knowledge today, we godless anti-metaphysicians still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by a faith that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine." *The Gay Science*, 282 – 283.

⁵⁵ For a discussion of the eternal return as a sudden feeling that functions to transform identity, see Pierre Klossowski, "Nietzsche's Experience of the Eternal Return," in *The New Nietzsche*, ed. by David Allison (Cambridge, MA: 1977), 107 – 108.

⁵⁶ In Nietzsche's view, the tragic, properly understood, as the affirmation of all existence as it will recur eternally, of the love of fate, as the knowledge that gives weight to the dancing creativity that it spawns.

think, in our post-Freudian times, that who we are is directly connected to our status as desiring (and desired) beings. “Sexual desire,” because of its importance within the economy of human practice and human self-understanding, has been a site where critical thought has sought to intervene in the reproduction of who we are since the Frankfurt School’s appeals to psychoanalysis.⁵⁷ The philosophical examples carried within a lineage of Nietzschean thinkers offer an important post-Freudian resource for critical theorists in this regard. Nietzsche himself, but also, in ways that are not precisely the same, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, Haraway, and Irigaray, all try to think within the movement of the desire(s) that constitutes their own identity. They all, in some sense, perform their political projects as an engagement with their self-understanding as desiring beings of a certain type, and, perhaps inevitably, their thought shades into analyses of how generalized understandings of this “desire” are concretized in our self-understandings as “sexual beings.” Rather than merely assuming or denying that desire is a natural substrate that informs inevitable patterns of human behavior, their projects have sought to look at how certain understandings of sexual desire are related to our self-understandings as political and ethical actors. If only for this reason, their thought continues to have an undeniable salience for the emancipatory political projects of living human beings; their projects open onto an area of experience that occupies a fundamental position within our self-understandings, and their projects, in various ways, have created new ways of imagining that experience and its political and ethical consequences. Nietzsche’s

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the role of psychoanalysis in the Frankfurt School, see Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923 – 1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 86 – 112.

playful encounter with the figure of “woman,” for example, situates thought as a movement towards one of its own limits, disrupting its own teleological movement in a way that begins to initiate a new mode of thought, a new ethos of interpretation, that transvalues Western thought’s preoccupation with interiority, consummation and ownership. Likewise, Luce Irigaray, whose example we will examine in some detail in chapter three, engages the language of desire that constitutes the possibilities of her own self-understanding but which inflects the assumed teleology of this desire (its seemingly inevitable trajectory) through the practice of a “mimetic irony.” In working along the seam of a changing but still historically specific understanding of desire, she insinuates a voice of absolute resistance that troubles the course of that discourse’s enactment, and, in doing so, opens up the space for new ways of thinking and acting.

For women struggling to gain a coherent sense of what it means to be a woman (or whether or not the struggle is itself valid), this tack is a way of taking seriously the dangers of working without the master’s tools (the interlocking practices of patriarchy and heterosexuality) when the master’s tools are the only tools to work with; it is a way of getting a foothold. We will explore these possibilities in greater detail in chapter four, but our more immediate focus will be on how, for those who (like me) sometimes occupy (a culturally and socially instantiated) superordinate position in these encounters, the moment of incommensurability preserved in this resistance stands as an indictment of the fuzzy warmth of a thinking’s masturbatory complacency. As Michel Foucault points out, in commenting on his own exploration of the constitutive power of

historically specific understandings of desire, “There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how to find it, or when it works up a case against them in the language of a naïve positivity.”⁵⁸

Though, in a sense, this investigation posits what it judges to be a politically and socially dominant notion of desire and then proceeds to critique that desire, the optional status of the category is in play from the first (perhaps “desire” should only be written with quotes). As such, the “critical desire” being posited here remains responsive to positive political phenomena without naively, rigidly, or immaturely wedding itself to that posited (interpreted) reality. The interrogation of critical theory’s transformative desire moves, therefore, in concert with a critique of a society’s received understandings of desire, yet it is necessarily a matter of auto-critique.

Which is not to say dialectical; for we don’t aim at a desire that impels us toward an overly-simple synthesis; our desire to give a coherent account of ourselves to an audience needs to be tempered by the absolute difference that desire experiences when it subjects itself to a thoroughgoing critique. Our desire to write this narrative, and the authority that we assume, is thus also being questioned; in questioning our authority, mocking it, we might be able to trouble the tenor of those places where we confer authority upon ourselves and one another, even as we take the obligations of our authority seriously. Perhaps, then, we can say that transvaluing the general structure of “desire” that continues to

⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2. Translated by Robert Hurley (Vintage Books: New York, 1990), 9.

inform our political, ethical and epistemic commitments is a place where we begin to transform ourselves and the political-discursive spaces that we occupy. “Desire itself” is being put into play in this process, opening up its semantic sway in a way that reveals the contingent character of its descriptive claims. Ultimately, we want to suggest, this opening-up of conceptual space offers us some insight into how we might negotiate, how we might speak and hear, within the affectively charged spaces of intersubjectivity that inform and trouble our vision of a more economically just, more radically pluralist, democracy. We want to do what we are saying to do.

Previously, I have looked at the structure of some of those desires – particularly those of commodity capitalism and heterosexuality – that most centrally constitute who we are, both literally and tropically, at the end of the twentieth century. These desires, in marking out the topography of what is proper to the individual, are also markers of the anxiety that many of us experience in these late modern times. As the perpetually reinforcing engines of technology and global capitalism continuously transform our identities, those whose status and psychic coherence are invested in their heterosexual and capitalist identities are estranged from the emerging world around them. Like most property owners, these individuals are resentful of challenges to the advantages of ownership. As new identities challenge these advantages, a backlash against these insurgencies often develops, revealing the limits of liberal-capitalist tolerance.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ For numerous examples, see Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: Morrow, 1999).

It is against this backdrop that the practice of “critical desire” has a particular value as an affirming activity. It offers us resources for re-imagining ourselves as desiring creatures who are affirmed in the movement of desire but who discover in its differentiating and deterritorializing play an alternative to the ignoble enslavement to the pursuit of its consummation. Tracing the arcs of our desires not only follows clues of our social construction, it also draws us onward to an encounter with the “other” of our thought and with the concrete “others” that so prominently figure our intimate life. These “others,” we discover, both enrich our lives with their presence and animate it with an insistent difference. An alertness to this difference, a difference manifested differently in different economies of desire, unseats the fiction of our mastering ego, disrupts the totality of our social world. It is therefore from within the perspectives configured by our desires that we wonder whether it might be possible to deploy our desire for a different future in more insistently democratic terms (that’s certainly part of our desire as critical theorists).

Such a deployment entails reimagining desire, but given the constitutive power of desire, how could this rethinking of desire even begin to occur? Our culturally inscribed understandings of desire are so much a part of the soil that grounds our coherence that it will be difficult to loosen their sedimented grip, and, in any case, our efforts will be complicated by the irony that any effort to overturn a desire is itself the product of a received desire. We do not, however, find these discussions an impediment to political action; they stand as necessary prelude and companion to any thought that could be called democratic.

By examining what we mean when we say “desire,” we hope to advance the project of critical theory by engaging in a more sophisticated vocabulary of political transformation across a variety of political encounters. It would be simpleminded to ignore the different levels on which political transformation occurs – the individual, the group, society *en toto* – but something of a general economy, or vocabulary, of transformation that begins to emerge in our exploration of desire can be instructive for the contemporary critical theorist.⁶⁰ Foucault's forays into the history of sexuality are exemplary in this regard. He not only seeks to describe historically variant discursive practices of desire, he also enacts a reimagined desire by taking up the problem of what appears, from within the movement of his philosophical desire, as incommensurable within a given way of thinking. Rather than chasing down the truth for its possession, he valorizes a philosophical-political commitment to “the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes ...” He has pursued his histories, he tells us, as just such a “philosophical exercise” in which the “object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one’s own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so

⁶⁰ Deleuze and Guattari endeavor to help us to understand how Nietzschean desire, being formulated as “desiring-production,” might orient our understanding of “social production.” To an inevitable question posed to any notion of “critical desire” about how Deleuze and Guattari bracket out questions about “the nature and the relationship of the two productions,” or whether “desiring-production and social-production are really two separate and distinct functions,” in order to “point out the fact that that the forms of social production, like those of desiring-production, involve an ungendered nonproductive attitude, an element of antiproduction that functions as a *socius*.” The *socius*, made manifest in productive activity, “falls back on (*il se rabat sur*) all production, constituting a surface over which the forces and agents of production are distributed, ... which now seem to emanate from it as a quasi cause.” This “merely phenomenological” parallel, whatever tough questions are elided in its exploration, opens up a new way of envisioning a given social field. We can now imagine various sites of the social (such as our subject positions) as surfaces that “record” the trajectories of desiring-production. It might be helpful to read these comments in relationship to a Nietzschean *logic of inscription* essayed below. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 10.

enable it to think differently.”⁶¹ Thinking through to the limits of a thinking opens that thinking toward that which is utterly “other” or outside of that thought.

We think that this way of thinking is an important resource for contemporary critical theory, but we are also convinced that its importance lies in its capacity to engender a different way of experiencing the world, and so we are committed to explicating this resource as being capable of resisting the materially and corporeally inscribed limits of our self-understanding, turning the techniques of “mnemotechnic enculturation” back upon themselves. We turn here, therefore, to an exemplary case of this thought’s (that is, this technique’s) emergence within a (inevitably) coded, corporeally sensitive context. This chapter looks at how this thought’s problematization of knowledge and ethics is staged in the works (which, as we know, also include, in some imperfectly understood way, the life) of Nietzsche.⁶² Reading Nietzsche in the context of the different desires (biographical, physiological, philosophical, etc.) that traverse, inflect, and expand beyond his texts allows us to thematize Nietzsche’s ongoing, sometimes exemplary confrontation with the “other” of his thought. Perhaps even more importantly, the thematization of “Nietzschean desire,” to the degree that it consciously plays with the imagery of man, woman and courtship, draws on notions of heterosexual normativity that are being explicitly interrogated by our effort to construct critical theory. That particular path, we will continue to reiterate, and the process of engagement that it validates, is part and parcel of the world that we bring into being.

⁶¹ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 9.

⁶² Given the deterritorializing effects of Nietzsche’s thinking, it should come as no surprise that as we trace a Nietzschean thematization of desire, we will have recourse to explaining this movement of “Nietzschean desire” by tracing its iterations in works by authors like Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, and Grosz.

But what do we mean by “Nietzschean desire,” by the still metaphysical sounding phrase, “the desire of Nietzsche’s thought” (or in its accumulating iterations such as, “the desire of Foucault’s thought”)? What is our warrant for this language?

When we speak of “Nietzschean desire” we will, in different moments of this narrative, be referring to temporally distinct manifestations of his (and, as the consequence of a cultivated mimetic diffraction, “our,” “my”) thinking. One such moment, almost the necessary foreground of this polytropical term, finds “Nietzschean desire” imbricated with the epochal orienting forms of thought that have served as the West’s reflective ground of political, economic, and cultural practice. This is the reactive “desire” in which “we” continue (or at least begin) to think.⁶³

Nietzsche’s account of consciousness implies that all thought, all will to power, is intertwined with “desire.” The formation of consciousness, as it necessarily occurs for social man, is inextricable from what Nietzsche calls the “bad conscience,” the internalization of force that cannot achieve an external discharge. Nietzsche dismisses the idea that a social “contract” lies at the beginning of society; rather society is forged by the force of “a conqueror and master race” that “lays its terrible claws upon a populace perhaps tremendously superior in numbers but still formless and nomad.”⁶⁴ Society is produced by the aesthetic freedom of these conquerors who now constrain the aimless freedom of

⁶³ The types “active” and “reactive” are drawn from Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), especially Chapter Two, “Active and Reactive,” 39 – 72.

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 86.

nomadic cultures. The artistic egos of these creators thus create the conditions of the bad conscience: “... it would not have developed *without them*, this ugly growth, it would be lacking if a tremendous quantity of freedom had not been expelled from the world, or at least from the visible world, and made as it were *latent* under their hammer blows and artists’ violence.”⁶⁵ Those who create the state, those first encoders of its apparatus,⁶⁶ necessarily create a space in which the “instinct for freedom” can no longer discharge itself externally. That instinct, in the appropriative act of the first masters, is an active manifestation of the pleasure associated with the will to power (when the master’s join together, they do so “only with the aim of an aggressive collective action and collective satisfaction of their will to power, and with much resistance from the individual conscience”⁶⁷), but it also sets up a regime that now always reflects desire, leading to its having its effects *within* that regime’s political space. This recoil of desire first issues forth as *ressentiment*, now sublimated and rerouted as a desire for revenge against those who are capable of seizing this world,⁶⁸ but it will eventually, under the redirecting manipulation of the priest, morph into “bad conscience,” man’s great self-contempt.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Ibid., 87.

⁶⁶ Gilles Deleuze, “Nomad Thought,” in *The New Nietzsche*. Ed. by David B. Allison (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1977), 142, 148.

⁶⁷ Ibid.,

⁶⁸ Nietzsche offers Tertullian’s telling comment about why Christians should avoid the “cruel pleasures” of the games: “if we crave blood, we have the blood of Christ ... But think of what awaits us on the day of his return, the day of his triumph.” *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 49. What awaits, but still promised (Nietzsche quotes Tertullian, in the Latin: “What *quaestor* or priest in his munificence will bestow on you the favour of seeing and exulting in such things as these? And yet even now we in a measure have them by faith in the picturings of imagination?” *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 50, 1967) is the *pleasure* of witnessing the eternal torments of “the evil.”

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 87, 90 – 92.

Consciousness, therefore, is the product of force turned back against itself, which Nietzsche characterizes as a desire that recoils upon itself. The man of *ressentiment* (blaming the other for the world) and bad conscience (blaming oneself) feels pleasure in revenging themselves on others and himself. To the degree that we all inhabit this history, we are the product of desires sublimated and turned inward in an ongoing enframing activity; the formation of “the subject,” or one’s “subject position,” is bound up with recoiling movement of these desires. Judith Butler has noted, in fact, the similarity of Nietzsche’s story about a redoubling will in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and Freud’s description of “conscience as the force of a desire – although sometimes a force of aggression – as it turns back on itself ...”⁷⁰

The man of *ressentiment*, no doubt, perceives all value creating activity as desiring activity, and he in fact condemns that which is good (that which the creative, the aristocratic, posits as “good”) by denying his own desire -- “I am not the writhing filth of this world, I am not that other who gives vent to his pleasing cruelty.” Nietzsche finds this denial absurd on two levels. On one level, it misidentifies the effect of given types: “To demand of strength that it should not express itself as strength, that it should not be a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that it should express itself as strength.”⁷¹ The condemnation of desire at this level does more, however, than merely outlaw illicit behaviors, it also circumscribes behavior as the choice of a

⁷⁰ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 1997.

⁷¹ *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 45.

responsible subject, slandering the enactment of the will to power as a choice that can, and should, be constrained, “as if there were a natural substratum behind the strong man, which was free to express strength or not to do so.”⁷²

At a second level, this valuating denial is absurd because it thinks that it's morality somehow allows it to escape the thrall of desire. True, within the space that social man now occupies, the man of *ressentiment* defines himself in contrast to the man that he calls “evil,” the man who had previously been valued as the “good,” and who had acted his desires. The lust for power that had characterized pre-historic man's unconscious species-activity does not, however, disappear with the establishment of the social order; rather, it is displaced (through the cultivation of *ressentiment*) and redirected (Nietzsche credits the ascetic priest for changing the direction of *ressentiment*, establishing it as a self-regulating “bad conscience” so as to ensure the maintenance of his regime of power, his will to power). These increasingly entropic movements are no the less a matter of desire.

The joyfulness of the creative man, Nietzsche's celebration of sexuality and an allegiance to the earth, of the joy of transgression, of overcoming, of gods who laugh and dance, gives us the sense that the overman will not deny the affective pulse of life. He or she will know these moments of affectivity differently; perhaps it is fair to say that desire will become an active desire. The experience will not remain mired in our habit of “desire,” of its old stories of fusion, presence, and solution. The will to power overcomes itself (its unconscious activity as a lust for power) by fulfilling its genealogical potential; it becomes capable of seeing the will to power as the differential elements between

⁷² Ibid., 45.

forces. It seems, therefore, that the process of overcoming that is our, we still encumbered ones, closest approximation of the overman suggests that the way we now know or enact our pleasures, what we often label “desire,” is also being transformed. That knowledge is becoming something other than a teleological movement of assimilation or fulfillment. Perhaps “desire” will, at some moment, at some other time, or for some “bull’s eye(s)” in the here and now, no longer seem quite right – it will carry too much baggage, remain too “reactive” – but right now it describes something of the mechanics of subject formation within a psycho-sexually charged social space. It experiences the “other” of its thought from a reactive position, but in taking up the theme of encounter that “it” initiates, it begins to imagine a different economy for that encounter. That alternative economy of encounter is post-dialectical, and thus, perhaps, “post-desiring”; it insists on the asymmetry of difference rather than a reconciled sameness.

Nietzsche’s encounter with his desires, we argue, is instructive for critical theory’s encounter with its “other” along several important dimensions. First, the repeated linking of “woman” to the “truth” marks Nietzsche’s encounter with his different desires. At least since Derrida’s *Spurs*, it has been recognized that this linkage reverberates throughout Nietzsche’s philosophy. In “Supposing truth is a woman,” Nietzsche connects the problematic nature of philosophical aspiration with the existential-ethical stakes of our worldly encounters with other people, and, in doing so, turns our attention to the ways in which our epistemological assumptions are themselves shot through with ethical and political consequences. If we could be allowed a preliminary imbrication of these two desires (for the

“truth” and for “woman”), we might say that Nietzsche’s thinking is constituted by the encounter with a concrete other whom he could neither resist nor fathom but whose very presence is emblematic of the ethics of thinking. These encounters with “woman” and “truth” raise a series of questions that point to the ways in which our attitude about the truth of the world is wrapped up with the attitudes with which we approach other people: Why do we desire to know the truth? Why do “we” desire women (who somehow approximate or miss “woman”)? What are the similarities between these metaphorically aligned desires? How can we use the comparison between the desire for the truth and the desire for woman in ways that illuminate both of these encounters as a moment of ethics?

Second, the specificity of *this* otherness (“woman” as “truth”) suggests one exemplary response to the problems of authorial presumption that are the guiding thread of *this dissertation’s* narrative (in which the author’s “distance” from his subject matter, feminism, serves as the heuristic focus for constructing a critical theory of politics). Because, for Nietzsche, the question of the “other” as “truth” is always in at least an analogous or metaphorical relationship to the question of sexual difference, his struggle with these questions are instructive for the story we are telling in this experiment. Furthermore, working through the specificity of Nietzsche’s encounters with “woman,” regardless of our ultimate judgment about those encounters, turns the attention of critical theory to the voice of the feminine and feminist “other” who has often been systematically excluded within the western intellectual tradition (even its liberatory tradition), marking out a complicity between that tradition and the actual distribution of

power in western society. The complex fate of this “other” in Nietzsche’s thought will be put into play over the course of the next two chapters – mired in interpretation, given wings, and then agonally resisted (in a way that challenges the valorization of agonal contestation as the only tempo available to a healthy politics; in a way that returns us to a swaying of interaction rather than the brilliant polemic bursts of argumentation).

None of this, it should be said here, is meant to excuse Nietzsche for his misogyny. Rather, his misogyny should be understood as part of what gives his work its exemplary force. To the degree that many males continue, to varying degrees, to carry within themselves a lingering misogyny, Nietzsche’s own struggles with his resentment towards woman and women may be particularly instructive. If we critical theorists are interested in speaking to these men (a group which, in some imprecise way, the author must include himself) about what we consider the cowardice of their attitudes towards women, mere accusations will be met with resistance. On the other hand, a thinking that is involved in the desire that it contests might draw these men into a space of ethical encounter that they would otherwise be quite incapable of experiencing. The overcoming of misogyny that is sometimes intimated in (or extracted from) Nietzsche’s thought cannot – given Nietzsche’s sustained critique of the life-denying aim of Christian morality and his hopes of overcoming modern man’s “epistemology of nihilism” – be cast in terms of selflessness; rather, Nietzsche, the thinker of forces and the will to power, effects this overcoming by thinking within the “desire of thought” and in relationship to the misogyny in which he himself is entangled. Within a masculine identity whose rhetoric of war and self-reliance still informs the self-

understanding of many men, Nietzsche suggests resources for imagining a new nobility capable of refiguring the desire in which thinking remains situated.

“Nietzsche,” in playing off the trope of “desire” by comparing “truth” to a “woman,” helps us imagine, within the thinking of a masculine desire itself, a way of reimagining that desire, of overcoming its stultifying logic of capture and control.

Fourth, the transvaluing of desire marked in Nietzsche’s texts – and the encounter with otherness to which it commits us – has proven crucial to contemporary critical theory because it reconnects thinking with the body. This thinking tries to work through thinking’s encounter with the other(s) of our thinking, through the whole question of subjectivity, in a way that attends to the physiological, felt and embodied nature of all thought. Fittingly, Nietzsche’s contribution to the language of a corporeal political intersubjectivity cannot be realized by merely attending to his texts. Those possibilities will be better realized when Nietzsche’s thought is brought into an encounter with a thinking that insists on its incommensurability with Nietzsche’s formulas, with “his truths.”⁷³ Nonetheless, Nietzsche, in putting the trope of desire into play (our relationship to “truth” is like our relationship to “woman”) forces us to consider the ways in which our habituated desires make our efforts at political transformation something that requires more than merely rethinking the world. This rethinking is, of course, fundamental to political transformation, but thinking is not merely an ideational exercise; it involves, as Nietzsche knew, an ability to install something new in the feelings. If ever Nietzsche’s thinking is democratic, it might be the degree to which he offers us hints as to how “we,”

⁷³ For Nietzsche’s attitude about disciples, see *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 103, 162 - 63

through practices of mnemotechnic enculturation, can produce ourselves as a people capable of living more admirably in response to the desires that we find ourselves inhabiting. The affective charge captured by our experience of “desire” – that proximity to presence and meaning that will always haunt the political – can be reimagined in ways that overcome the fascist telos of that desire.⁷⁴

In general, Nietzsche’s thinking suggests a way of embracing desire (at the different sites where it becomes manifest) without becoming entranced by its promise of fulfillment; it suggests ways of overcoming our *resentiment* at the frailty of what we had dreamed was our unique identity and the bad conscience that has encrusted the failures of that identity as the limit of our destiny. Or to put it slightly differently, Nietzsche’s thinking might be elaborated in ways that affirm life at those exact sites, like men’s understanding of their proper relationships with women, where the desires that make up our dreams have turned out to be a dead end, a false promise. Furthermore, because he allows “desire” to slide in and out of his discussions of “force” and “the will to power,” he is able to suggest that we rethink desire as a confluence of forces that precedes and disrupts the fiction of the ego, and which, in the power of its movement draws us outside of ourselves (outside of the reified construct of the ego) towards that which remains other to our experience, cultivating alternatives to the insistent interiority of our thinking. The confrontation with the other of our understanding thematized

⁷⁴ “And not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini – which was able to mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively –but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us.” We note here the link that Foucault makes between desire and fascism. Foucault, Preface to *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), xiii.

by Nietzsche, then, in its movement, draws our thought along the path of a concrete ethical encounter.

II Reading

Supposing truth is a woman – what then? Are there not grounds for the suspicion that all philosophers, insofar as they were dogmatists, have been very inexpert about women? That the gruesome seriousness, the clumsy obtrusiveness with which they have usually approached truth so far have been awkward and very improper methods for winning a woman’s heart? What is certain is that she has not allowed herself to be won – and today every kind of dogmatism is left standing dispirited and discouraged. If it is left standing at all! For there are scoffers who claim that all dogmatism lies on the ground – even more that all dogmatism is dying.⁷⁵

Nietzsche’s encounter with women casts so much of his particular intensity that anyone who thinks *with* Nietzsche inevitably thinks with him about women and the question of “woman.” The vitriol of so many of his remarks about women, or the pathos of some of the others, tell us we are somewhere near the heart of the matter.

It is not immediately clear, however, how the centrality of “woman” in Nietzsche’s thought should be interpreted. Let us defer, therefore, this question of “woman,” so that we can get clear about how she works as a center of gravity within Nietzsche’s thinking. For, in fact, how we interpret the role and the effects of “woman” in Nietzsche’s thought, and thus how we interpret that thought more generally, cannot be understood apart from his understanding of interpretation – and questions of reading and writing.⁷⁶ What are the demands, desires, rights, responsibilities, and possibilities that

⁷⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, from the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 1.

⁷⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles/Eperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche*, trans. by Barbara Harlow (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979). Derrida’s reconsideration of the question of “woman”

readers bring to a text or a phenomena? What is the relationship between a thinker and his thought, between an author and his text? And, by extension, how do these problems of textual interpretation model or affect our obligations for “reading” other human beings?⁷⁷ Of how we comport ourselves towards the other? And then, therefore, in an infinite progress, what violence is being persecuted in this thinking that takes up the question of another’s thought? These questions, thematized to varying degrees, are everywhere in Nietzsche’s thinking. In fact, a productive way of reading Nietzsche’s thinking is to follow it as an oscillation between the poles of interpretive closure (what we, following Derrida, will call “hermeneutics”) and interpretive relativism.⁷⁸ His thinking traces this interpretive problematic, this tension between closure and openness, across the traditionally distinct realms of textual criticism, psychology, metaphysics, ethics, and politics.

Nietzsche’s textual approach to philosophy no doubt reflects the philological training that he would sometime criticize, but from which he never sought complete escape. That training taught Nietzsche a great respect for the integrity of the text, the possibilities of its subtleties, and of its right to be heard.⁷⁹ Nietzsche’s philological respect for the probity of the text, or for any phenomenon that he read as a text (such as an individual’s psychological makeup), links a side of Nietzsche’s work to a hermeneutic

in Nietzsche’s thought, and the import of this reconsideration for the reopening of Nietzsche’s thought in a more general way, contours much of the following narrative.

⁷⁷ “Reading” here, given the violence that it entails, resonates with its meaning within homosexual and drag culture. In this context, “‘reading’ means taking someone down, exposing what fails to work at the level of appearance, insulting or deriding someone.” The definition is Judith Butler’s, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 129.

⁷⁸ For a more detailed account of how Nietzsche’s thought provides resources for negotiating the tension between “dogmatism” and “relativism,” see Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale, ed. by Maudemaire Clark and Brian Leiter (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5.

tradition that seeks to understand the *truth* of the text and which remains concerned with the coherence of a text's presentation. That tradition, initiated and formalized by Schliermacher and Dilthey, holds that a successful interpretation involves gaining greater clarity about the original context in which a text or a phenomenon arises and then imputing that origin as the guiding thread of its interpretation. For Schliermacher, this clarity entails a psychological reconstruction of an author's original intent. It demands an effort to get "inside" the author.⁸⁰ Dilthey, seeking a more objective foundation for hermeneutics, sought to reconstruct the possibilities of subjectivity created by the confluence of specific historical processes.⁸¹ In any of its guises, the hermeneutic impulse seeks to reconcile the disparate elements of a text (which, of course, might be the "text" of the relationship between the author's life and the text) into a cohesive whole and to adduce this whole as the author's meaning.

Of course, willy nilly, we are performing such a reconciliation. We are fixing Nietzsche (We are, no doubt, rehearsing the drama of emasculation). We might, in fact, be accusing Nietzsche (a thinker who praised Mirabeau because of his capacity to forget, to let it all slide off his shoulders⁸²), as being fixated himself. Don't be discouraged by these accusations that knot this text; they are a place where Nietzsche's philosophy takes place and where his philosophy exerts its overtly political character.

To read Nietzsche's thought or to read his psychological makeup involves a similar operation, and it is improbable that the domains of textual and biographical-psychoanalytical interpretation can be held distinct from one another. For the hermeneut

⁸⁰ Schrift, 2. For a discussion of the conservative implications of hermeneutic interpretive strategies, see Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 57 – 77.

⁸¹ Schrift, 2-3.

⁸² *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 39.

or the biographer-psychoanalyst, any loose element is destined to be fitted into the texts' larger story,⁸³ or to be ignored as irrelevant. From a certain range of hermeneutically inspired perspectives, therefore, it seems impossible to ignore how the centrality of "woman" in Nietzsche's work fits with the story of his life. When, today, one reads about Nietzsche's relations with various women in his life, it is difficult not to begin to psychoanalyze him and to draw his work into the circle of that psychoanalytic reading. We may not be exactly sure of how the various women in Nietzsche's life affected his thought (some effects no doubt emerge indirectly, uncontrollably, undecidably from the subconscious), but we have a sense that they had some very precise effects on its content. If we can get enough information about Nietzsche's relationships with women, if we dutifully catalogue the appearances of "woman," "women," "the feminine," etc. in his philosophy, and if we then carefully trace out the relationships between these two domains, then it would be possible, we think, to get clear about the Nietzsche whose thinking appears before us. Or, in a method that amounts to much the same, we can stick to the texts, and find in their play of themes and repetition of phrases those symptoms that delineate the author.⁸⁴ In any case, we can read Nietzsche.

Nietzsche himself would, in some sense, endorse such a practice. Moving beyond his respect for the probity of the text, his career long effort to philosophize with a hammer, to sound out the idols of his age, pursues an *ad hominem* approach. He seeks to read his idols by connecting their actions and the content of their writings with

⁸³ Derrida draws the close connection between hermeneutic strategies and psychoanalysis. Trying to find the significance for Nietzsche's enigmatic, seemingly trivial, unpublished note, "I have forgotten my umbrella," the psychoanalyst "might yet aspire to a hermeneutic mastery of these remains." Derrida, *Spurs*, 131.

⁸⁴ See, for example, Caroline Joan S. Picart, *Resentment and the "Feminine" in Nietzsche's Politico-Aesthetics* (University Park, PA: The Penn State Press, 1999).

interpretations of their underlying physiological and psychological aims.⁸⁵ Nietzsche, the psychologist, reads other thinkers by looking for the ways that their work betrays whom they are, for the signs of their deeper selves that pops to the surface of their works. Lou Salomé, who, according to any hermeneutic-psychological criterion, plays a fundamental role in understanding Nietzsche's philosophical treatment of "woman," saw that an interpretation of his oeuvre that failed to explore the links between his conscious life, his unconscious drives, and his philosophical work would be highly un-Nietzschean.⁸⁶ Nietzsche, she reminds us, asserted that all philosophies are the "personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir."⁸⁷ And Nietzsche, it seems, expects that at least a few select others will be able to read him with the same acuity with which he had read his idols. In *Ecce Homo*, the autobiography in which

⁸⁵ Nietzsche's foreshadowing of Freudian thought has been noted and debated for quite sometime. Freud himself famously said that no one in history possessed Nietzsche's psychological understanding of himself and, separately, that he had consciously avoided reading Nietzsche so as to protect the originality of his own work. For a sustained treatment of the relationship between Nietzsche and Freud, see Ronald Lehrer, *Nietzsche's Presence in Freud's Life and Thought: On the Origins of a Psychology of Dynamic Mental Functioning* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995).

Robert C. Solomon writes that Nietzsche, "suspicious of claims to universality and necessity," often preferred psychological analyses to philosophical doctrine. Though this formulation generally resonates with my point that Nietzsche's work is always entangled with an analytic of the existential-subjective experiences of the historical figures and thinkers Nietzsche writes about, Solomon may underspecify "necessity" in this context. Nietzsche's thought continually revolves around the encounter between that which is necessary in specific contexts and the possibilities of (problematicized notion of) freedom that such an encounter engenders. Universality and necessity, in other words, do not necessarily go hand in hand. Robert C. Solomon, "Nietzsche *Ad Hominem*: Perspectivism, Personality, and *Ressentiment*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. by Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 180.

⁸⁶ Salomé claimed special insight into the centrality of this theme in Nietzsche's work. Her "preface" to her book on Nietzsche is a letter to her from Nietzsche which begins, "My dear Lou, Your idea of reducing philosophical systems to the personal records of their originators is truly an idea arising from a 'brother-sister brain.' In Basel I myself taught the history of ancient philosophy in just *this* sense. I liked to tell my listeners that such-and-such 'a system has been disproved and is dead, but the *person* behind the system cannot be disproved and that the person cannot be killed' – Plato, for instance." Lou Salomé, *Nietzsche: The Man in His Works*. Trans. by Siegfried Mandel (Redding Ridge, CT: Black Swan Books, 1988), 3.

⁸⁷ Salomé, 3. The quote is from Friederich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 13.

Nietzsche explicitly links even the smallest details of his life with his philosophy, he implores his readers that "*Above all, do not mistake me for someone else.*"⁸⁸

Nietzsche invites us to "read" him and demands that we read him correctly, despite the risk that we might get him wrong. It's hard not to. But it always gets done; there's something to it. Working backwards from only two incidents that occurred after his insanity in 1888, for example, we might imagine ourselves able, if only temporarily, to put the storm and stress of Nietzsche's thought to bed. In the first of these incidents, we find Nietzsche, with the perfect clarity of the insane, confiding to his caretakers at Jena "It was my wife Cosima Wagner who brought me here." In the second incident, at the asylum at Basel, he would make a simple, childlike drawing of a couple embracing. The couple are set next to a shield with a heraldic cross, the same kind of cross that can be found on the "lion memorial" at Lucerne's Gletschergarten, where, in May of 1882, Nietzsche had unsuccessfully proposed to Lou Salomé.⁸⁹

What are we to make of these events? We know that Nietzsche was smitten, in some kind of way, by both of these women, and that their influence on his work is far from negligible.⁹⁰ Even without a rigorous account of these events, or without detailing the effects of being raised by a household of women after the early death of his father,⁹¹ we might already suspect that Nietzsche's thought could be bundled up in a predictable Freudian (which is to say, or so this stumbling, groping advance suggests, Nietzschean)

⁸⁸ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 217.

⁸⁹ Siegfried Mandel, from the introduction to Lou Salomé, *Friederich Nietzsche: The Man in His Works*, trans. by Siegfried Mandel (Redding Ridge, CT: Black Swan Books, Ltd, 1988), vii.

⁹⁰ On Nietzsche's relationship with Lou Salomé and its possible effects on the composition of *Zarathustra*, see Ronald Hayman, *Nietzsche: A Critical Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 244 – 56.

⁹¹ For an account of Nietzsche's upbringing and the possible effects of being acquainted with the "rule of women," see Carol Diethe, *Nietzsche's Women: Beyond the Whip* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 11 – 30.

package. In these two incidents, in Nietzsche's inability, finally, to free himself from the regrets of his past, one might find the key to both the neediness and the stalking intensity of Nietzsche's thought. Suddenly, the telling *truth* has popped to the surface. Madness, it seems, had finally shattered the play of mirrors (the constant deferrals of his philosophy, his overweening courtesy) behind which Nietzsche had hid, revealing in a flash a compelling, pathetic tale of a man possessed by possessions that he denied, uncovering a desire that he could neither refuse nor fulfill. The preoccupation with "woman" that marks his philosophical corpus would seem to signal, if nothing else, an obsession with the countervailing forces manifested in his desire for women. It was both the place where the articulatory force, the feeling, of the will to power, was its most intense, but also where that power, as an act of will, threatens its most frustrating impotence.

III. The Closure of Metaphysics, The Ontology of Desire.

But let us again deflect this confrontation with woman.⁹² For it is germane, given the heuristic purposes of our appropriation of Nietzsche, to note that the hermeneutic-psychological impulse in Nietzsche's thought – in its complicity with the desire to posit a true reading of his work – is imbricated with the *metaphysical longing* that animates his thinking and with which he continued to struggle throughout his career. Attending to this imbrication draws our attention to Nietzsche's focus on the problem of a structurally necessary desire that inheres within thought. Thus, to think toward the function of "woman" in Nietzsche's thought cannot be limited to the yearnings of a biographical

⁹² In this iteration, another famous deferral of Nietzsche's "woman." Here, it is Heidegger's omission of thought "becoming female" in his otherwise microscopic reading of Nietzsche's "History of an Error" from the *Twilight of the Idols*. "Heidegger analyzes all the elements of Nietzsche's text with the sole exception of the idea's becoming-female. In such a way does one permit oneself to see without reading, to read without seeing." Derrida, *Spurs*, 85.

Nietzsche (though it cannot be held completely distinct, either). As we have noted, Nietzsche thematizes this problem of our desire for the truth by comparing it with our⁹³ desire for “woman.” He judges other thinkers by the way in which they comport themselves with this “woman.” Do they rush in? Or do they maintain a distance? Nietzsche turns the question of truth into a judgment about our relationship to the “truth” by underlining truth’s status as an object of desire. In his thinking, a certain strategy and tempo of seduction valorizes and prepares the way for a certain ethos of interpretation.

Nietzsche finds the allure of this desire irresistible. He wants woman/truth. Both the hermeneutic and metaphysical impulses of his thought are stubbornly persistent, and there seem to be moments when he thinks within the teleology of thought, towards a moment of enclosure, coherence, presence, and ownership. So strong is this pull within the lineages of our thought that even Nietzsche, it seems – a thinker committed to thinking the other of hermeneutic enclosure, the other of metaphysical truth, the other of his desire – cannot completely escape its grasp. These “others” must be brought, whether consciously or surreptitiously, into the orbit of his thought.

Heidegger suggests, in fact, that this movement of enclosure was fundamental to Nietzsche’s thought. In his analysis, Nietzsche’s thought, despite its rhetoric of overcoming, remains trapped by the reactive, resentful kinds of responses to human finitude at which it takes aim. Though Zarathustra taught his friends that “the will” was to be privileged as “the name of the liberator and joy bringer” that opens up the

⁹³ Our? The “we” that still thinks within and still thinks as natural the specifically heterosexual, masculine, and capitalist modes of desire that remain well entrenched in contemporary society. Not the “we” that understands imagines, constructs, or insists on the importance of other permutations of desire (“feminine ‘desire,’” “queer desires”), and certainly not the imagination of a post-identitarian desire. Not yet. We suspect that those desires are only available, at least immediately, to the first “we” from within the perspective of their received notion of desire. This dissertation wants to *go through* that first desire. The appropriation of Nietzsche that begins to emerge in this chapter, then, might be thought of as a meditation on how to get “there” from “here” in a way that always contests the privileged status of that “there.”

possibility of living affirmatively in the face of Silenus's wisdom, he points out that "the will itself is still a prisoner." "The will cannot will backwards; and that he cannot break time and time's covetousness, that is the will's loneliest melancholy."⁹⁴ Nietzsche's effort to articulate an affirmative response to the triumph of nihilism is complicated by the fragment, riddle, and dreadful accident of time's "it was." The bedrock facticity of this passing threatens to turn the will to power into something vulgar, into the spirit of revenge. "This, indeed this alone, is what *revenge* is: the will's will against time and its 'it was.'"⁹⁵ Unable to harness the "it was" into its aesthetic, voluntarist response to contingency, of turning the "it was" into "But thus I willed it," the will turns its wrath on those around him. "[O]n all who can suffer he wreaks revenge for his inability to go backwards."⁹⁶

Nietzsche proclaims that the metaphysical heritage of the Western philosophical tradition is meant to address this "it was," but that tradition, he tells us, has been a life-denying subterfuge, the sign of humanity's inability to affirm that which is most terrible in its existence. Because man has lacked the courage to live affirmatively with time's truth and with his own finitude, man has postulated a more perfect world behind the scenes. Man remains resentful of his finitude. Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, by contrast, teaches the overcoming of the thinking of metaphysics; he teaches the affirmation of a contingent and imperfect world, the overcoming of Christian resentment. Yet Heidegger makes the case that Nietzsche is unable, at the end of the day, to escape the very metaphysics that he critiques. Nietzsche/Zarathustra, too, needs his reassuring illusion.

⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for None and All*, "On Redemption," trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), 139

⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 140.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

The Nietzschean effort to think the thought of the will to power and the thought of the eternal-return in conjunction with one another has the effect, Heidegger claims, of heroizing the present. This heroization allows Nietzsche to bring the “other” of his thought back under his subjective control, effectively sneaking metaphysical closure back into his thought through the back door. The success of Nietzsche’s efforts to philosophize affirmatively, Heidegger suggests, is dependent upon the completion of the circling of his thought. He needs the circle, for only in its completion can it appear with the crossing of “the bridge that is called the deliverance from the spirit of revenge.”⁹⁷ Thus “becoming” is granted permanence by being thought within the ambit of the Eternal-Return. “The highest will to power – that is, the life force in all life – is to represent transience as a fixed Becoming within the Eternal Recurrence of the same, and so to render it secure and stable.”⁹⁸ Thus domesticated, Nietzsche’s thought of the “it was” remains subordinate; it does not deliver Nietzsche’s thought from the spirit of revenge. He too enacts the violence of enclosing transience. He too, like the Platonists/Christians he attacks, kills life in order to survive. Nietzsche’s confrontation with the radicality of his finitude overcomes nothing.

If this closes the thought on Nietzsche, we can see how this single thought of enclosure resonates with Nietzsche’s inability to free himself from the expectations of heterosexuality. “Woman,” “women,” “the feminine”: these figures mark a *seemingly essential*, particularly difficult site for Nietzsche’s own test of self-overcoming. As early as *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche had found the inevitability of sexual difference as emblematic of the creative tension between order and strife, noting “that the continuous

⁹⁷ Martin Heidegger, “Who is Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*,” trans. by Bernd Magnus, in *The New Nietzsche*, ed. David Allison (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 75.

⁹⁸ Heidegger, 75.

development of art is bound up with the Apollonian and Dionysian duality – just as procreation depends on perpetual duality of the sexes, involving perpetual strife with only periodical intervening reconciliations.”⁹⁹ In this (now more fashionable than ever) conceit of heterosexual relations as war, Nietzsche intimates the model of desire that informs a certain strand of his thought: that which is desired is to be captured.

“Supposing truth is a woman,” we can see that she functions, as the untruth of truth that is the truth of truth, much like the “it was” in Nietzsche’s thought – a figure beyond thinking’s capacity to re-present it. And though Nietzsche has promised to affirm these moments of otherness within his thought, his language about women and “woman” seems to suggest something other than affirmation. Particularly in light of his own inability to overcome the “it was” of his specific relationships with women, Nietzsche’s proclamations about women seem pure *ressentiment*. “Woman” and “women” are eventually brought to heel, granting a specificity to Nietzsche’s own warning that “[O]n all who can suffer he wreaks revenge for his inability to go backwards.”¹⁰⁰

Accordingly, Nietzsche’s endorsements of *amor fati* seem to ring hollow against his resentful, misogynistic tendency to lash out against women for their inability and/or unwillingness to play their “proper” role. “Women,” he would infamously write, “are at best cows,” mere herd animals dependent upon a husband’s guidance. The philosopher whose Zarathustra enthuses that life is “merely changeable and wild and woman in every way – even if you men call me profound, faithful, eternal, and mysterious”¹⁰¹ would end as just another man prudently managing his women’s lives in the economy of his thought.

⁹⁹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music and The Case of Wagner*. Trans by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 33.

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 240.

¹⁰¹ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, “The Dancing Song,” 108.

Those uncouth dogmatists whom Nietzsche rebukes for wanting to know the truth of woman would always include Nietzsche himself. It would seem that the philosopher who proclaimed “the will to a system” to be merely another metaphysical delusion, and for whom that which merely repeats itself is dead, was himself always caught up in just such a systematizing metaphysical repetition, unable to shake the received story of desire in which he found himself entangled. At the end of the day, beneath it all, Nietzsche’s thought about woman overcomes nothing. He remains, to the last, a man.

IV. My Aim is True

At a general level, then, reasonable arguments can be made that, for one reason or another, Nietzsche’s thought, despite its hesitations and obfuscations, is essentially systematic. The different elements within his thought can be reconciled within different, though logically similar, reductive economies. Nietzsche’s thought can be explained psychologically. Or it can be read hermeneutically, as a text whose coherence can be established through agreed upon understandings of textual integrity. Or it can be seen as the thought that, in seeking to overcome metaphysics by thinking beyond its closure, only reinscribes that closure.

All of the interpretations offered above are plausible. They all capture something of the “truth” of a multiplicitous Nietzsche, one whose all too human heterosexuality marks a space with which many of “us” continue to struggle. The “real” Nietzsche would, in any case, be difficult to disentangle from the stresses of these interpretations. Moreover, it is important for us, in the journey of *our* narrative, to *go through* these “Nietzsches” in thinking of the possibilities of something different that emerges in his

thought (to go through these reactive perspectives, that is). For it is only in relationship to the specific enclosures sustained by his representation of experience, to the certainties of his received self-understandings, and to our (dramaturgically imagined) interpretations of the relationship between these “facts” and his work, that the Nietzschean ethos of self-overcoming gains its exemplary value. The Nietzsche who arrives in this narrative emerges within the imbricated contexts of the “Nietzsches” that we are, ineluctably, in the act of pinning down – Nietzsche the father of psychology, Nietzsche the thinker of embodiment par excellence, Nietzsche the heterosexually entranced misogynist, Nietzsche the impresario of his aesthetic self-presentation, Nietzsche the closet metaphysician. These Nietzsche’s (and others not catalogued) encumber our reading.

Some such encumbrance, however, seems to fundamentally govern Nietzsche’s appraisal of how man might live nobly in a given historical milieu; he warns us that the desire for an uncomplicated freedom is symptomatic of a slave morality.¹⁰² The dalliance of an unproblematic freedom, Nietzsche realizes, is its own kind of servitude; it too carries the threat of an identity – one in which all the differential tensions that constitute our present selves have lost their productive and creative force. Nietzsche worries that the leveling tendencies of modern political forms such as democracy, socialism, and feminism only serve to exacerbate a slavish valorization of equality and freedom, eviscerating the potential of noble human beings. Thus Nietzsche, in seeking to draw out a reconceived notion of nobility, must somehow imagine how he and his intellectual and spiritual kin might steel themselves against the seductive call of the times. He must eschew the giddy desire for the unproblematic understandings of “freedom” and “equality” proffered as the ultimate values of modern society. As he puts it, “the seeker

¹⁰² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 207 – 208.

after knowledge forces his spirit to recognize things against the inclination of the spirit and often enough also against the wishes of his heart – by way of saying No when he would like to say Yes, love, and adore – and thus act as an artist and transfigurer of cruelty.”¹⁰³ He and the other “free spirits” who prepare the way for the overman insist on a strategy of refusal that valorizes the restrictive implications of knowledge as the site where what passes for knowledge in our times (such as our knowledge of “woman”) can become a site for an experiment, an engagement, with the processes of becoming in which we are involved. The longing in Nietzsche’s work, cast in terms of transvaluation and self-overcoming, paradoxically suggests Nietzsche’s own understanding of the interrelationship between freedom and enslavement.

It is precisely here, in meditating on the relationship between the knowledge that constitutes our self-understandings and the “learning” that “changes us,” that Nietzsche calls on the prevailing norms of heterosexuality (and the understanding of “woman” that inheres within this normativity) as an exemplary site for the test of his self-overcoming. For though “learning changes us,” Nietzsche reflects that “at the bottom of us, really ‘deep down,’ there is, of course, something unteachable, some granite of spiritual *fatum*, of predetermined decision and answer to predetermined selected questions.” Though there are points where Nietzsche and his fellow free spirits will undoubtedly reduce solutions to these unavoidable “truths” as matters deserving faith and conviction, Nietzsche presumes that any such a solution to what is unteachable and unchangeable within us is ultimately only a marker of our “great stupidity” in relation “to our spiritual *fatum*.” Such an unteachable strata within ourselves is “the problem we *are*.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 159.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 162.

As Heidegger himself intimates, his “closed” reading of Nietzsche’s thought gestures toward an unspeakable possibility that Nietzsche’s thought has limned. His reading of Nietzsche, Heidegger tells us, has not been aimed at refuting Nietzsche’s thoughts. He has merely charted Nietzsche’s collusion in the culmination of metaphysics “in order to bring into focus how much and in what way Nietzsche’s thinking moves within the spirit of thinking-to-date.”¹⁰⁵ There is something, however, in the grappling with the question of metaphysics, that suggests something other than the thought of this metaphysics: “something comes to the fore in Nietzsche’s thought that that thinking itself can no longer think. Such a falling behind what has been thought is typical of creative thinking...” By the very act of completing metaphysics, Nietzsche’s way of thinking “points in an exceptional sense toward something unthought, something clear and confused at the same time.”¹⁰⁶

A Nietzsche who effects an unproblematic escape from the metaphysical, hermeneutical, or psychological enclosures that his thought feigns to overcome is foreign to the spirit of the “Nietzsche” that has begun to emerge in these pages. To insist on his escape from the constitutive facts of his own existence would, in fact, be but another version of Nietzsche falling prey to the very metaphysical thinking that he attacks. In fact, it is the very entanglements in which that thinking proceeds that gives his thinking its oomph. Perhaps, even within a thinking that cannot not desire that which it lacks, it is the very enactment of this struggle (and not its completion) that is fundamental to Nietzsche’s relationship to the world in which he finds himself. This would explain, in part, Nietzsche’s response to the leveling that he sees as characteristic of modernity’s

¹⁰⁵ Heidegger, 76.

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger, 76 – 77.

nihilism, and it goes some way in explaining Nietzsche's distrust of a then emergent feminism. In dismantling the tension between men and women, feminism/modernity threatens to efface the heuristic possibilities that inhere in that tension. It obscures a specific historical possibility in which our desire (and our inability) to capture the mystified object of our desire (woman/truth) leads us beyond our otherwise unassailable provinciality. Thus, though Nietzsche finds the idea of the eternal feminine to be ridiculous, he is insistent that the socially constructed understandings of "woman" in which he finds himself enmeshed are *for him* essentially unalterable. It is that recurring eternity in which his understanding of a differentiating will to power emerges; it is where (a fundamental place where) his struggle to overcome himself occurs. In stating "a few truths about 'woman as such,'"¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche is not falling back into an essentialism that he insistently opposes; these statements mark out a limit that traverses his thought and, in doing so, calls forth the particular style of his overcoming. It gives specificity to a general economy of engagement that "we" feminists and critical theorists might appropriate in our efforts to engage the limits that form the space of *our truths*.

What Heidegger calls the "unthought," personified and metaphorically displaced, we argue, in the figure of "woman," makes quite a difference. It makes a *productive* difference. It differentiates the desire in which Nietzsche finds himself entangled; the desire for something that he lacks (truth/woman) is transformed into an affirming desire that celebrates its encounter with a force that remains distinct, appropriatable. As we shall see, Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari's appropriation of "Nietzsche" further turns us toward a *rethinking* of a desire for consummation, regardless of what domains of thinking (whether in terms of a metaphysics of presence, or the pragmatic necessity of

¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 162.

hermeneutic closure, or in the transcendence and loss of the orgasm) it traverses. Rather than think of desire as that which is constituted by its lack, Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari cast Nietzschean desire as productive, finding in his thinking a differentiating desire for a difference beyond calculation. Desire, it seems, is a place where our reading of Nietzsche overturns.

V. Embodied Thought: The Nietzschean Thinking of Inscription

A major legacy of Nietzsche's thinking is his ability to draw thinking into a visceral register. Nietzsche's philosophy is no mere ideational exercise; it is the site of his embodied, existential entanglement with his self and with the world. This, in fact, is a good reason for tracing the thematic of Nietzschean desire: the interrogation of identity that opens identity towards an other that it cannot contain is thereby suffused with an attention to the physiological and experiential dimensions of such a questioning.¹⁰⁸

Nietzsche, in fact, argues that the connection between identity and the physiological and experiential is a powerful part of a linguistically enshrined identity structure's tendency to reproduce itself. As Tracy Strong neatly summarizes Nietzsche's position, "humans read the 'unfamiliar back into the familiar,' and derive a feeling of power, comfort, and satisfaction from having understood a new event in terms of the structure that ensures them a particular sway over the world."¹⁰⁹ The experiential power of the familiar means that Nietzsche's efforts to militate against the deadening effects of

¹⁰⁸ One cannot ignore how Nietzsche's strategies for reading resonate with the pervasive influence of materialism in German intellectual life during the middle and second half of the 19th century. In his *History of Materialism*, a book for which Nietzsche professed a great deal of enthusiasm, Friedrich Lange wrote that "The nature of man is ... only a special case of universal physiology, as though it is only a special case in the chain of the physical processes of life." As quoted in Maudemaire Clarke and Brian Leiter, from the Introduction to Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xi.

¹⁰⁹ Tracy Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 68-69.

identity will itself travel through the body. To the degree that desire has been unproblematically understood in ways that reproduce, at a physiological and habitual level, the identities its movement might disrupt, Nietzsche reformulates desire, gives it an alternative economy, in his effort to teach us new ways of thinking about identity. Nietzsche's thinking, hovering at the paradoxes of identity, calls into question the unproblematic, embodied solidity that we grant identities, but it is always in relationship to those embodied identities that his thought of overcoming gathers its gravity and its joy. He makes transformative thought into a physiological activity.

What status does Nietzsche assign to identity? In part, it functions as a site for his critique of western metaphysics. Identity – the notion that “a = a” – is a fundamental assumption within the thought of this metaphysics.¹¹⁰ Nietzsche scoffed at the ability of any identity to totally capture the reality with which it is associated; identities are in some sense always fictional. “Truths”, Nietzsche famously asserts, “are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are.” For Nietzsche, neither this capacity to partially delineate a vector of our identity structures, nor the ideologies of truth which support these structures, allow us to know or re-present the truth of experience, of the thing-in-itself. As he argues in “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense,” our ability to approximate the truth is always the function of a simulation. To know the world, and to be able to speak and write about it, entails a series of metaphorical transpositions that distances language from the “truth,” giving all of its utterances the status of “lie”: “A nerve stimulus, first transposed into an image – first metaphor. The image, in turn,

¹¹⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, “Nietzsche and the Stomach for Knowledge,” in *Nietzsche, Feminism and Political Theory*. St. Leonards, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1993.

imitated by sound – second metaphor ...”¹¹¹ Thus the world, to the degree that it is nothing other than the constant flux of a becoming, remains beyond our efforts to conceptualize it. What is it one seeks, Nietzsche asks, when one seeks knowledge? “Nothing more than this: something strange is made into something familiar.” And though philosophers “think they are doing a thing an *honor* when they dehistoricize it, *sub specie aeterni* – when they make a mummy of it. All that philosophers have handled for millenia have been conceptual mummies; nothing actual has escaped from their hands alive.”¹¹²

The inherently fictional nature of language, however, should not be misconstrued to imply identities are somehow impractical or immaterial, somehow unreal. To the contrary, their pragmatic effects are very real. According to Nietzsche’s historical account, concepts, names and structures of identity have been crucial for man’s survival and historical development. “The intellect,” Nietzsche tells us, functions to preserve the individual through “its chief powers in simulation.”¹¹³ The epistemological limits of thought enable us “Not ‘to know’ but to schematize – to impose upon chaos as much regularity as our practical needs require.”¹¹⁴ Though this simulation will undoubtedly lead to the comical vanity of thinking that our self-deceptions (our religion, our systematic and metaphysical philosophies, our conventions of social interaction) are in fact the truth, Nietzsche recognizes that some such simulation is necessary for surviving a world inimical to human existence. Some such structure is necessary for human health,

¹¹¹ Nietzsche, “Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense,” *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking, 1954), 46.

¹¹² Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “‘Reason’ in Philosophy, 1, as quoted in Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation*, 135.

¹¹³ Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense,” 43.

¹¹⁴ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 515 (March-June 1888), trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 278.

at both the individual and social level. For the individual, “this is a universal law: a living thing can be healthy, strong and fruitful when bounded by a horizon; if it is incapable of drawing a horizon around itself, and at the same time too self-centered to enclose its own view within that of another, it will pine away slowly or hasten to its timely end.”¹¹⁵ This necessity of psychic coherence at the level of the individual is reproduced at the social level, where man “requires a peace pact and he endeavors to banish at least the very crudest *bellum omnium contra omnes* from his world.”¹¹⁶

Like Hobbes, Nietzsche saw the important connection between the power of naming and political order. Nietzsche, however, goes further than Hobbes does; he points out how the stories we tell ourselves to justify our political and economic orders are more than mere words. They gain their power, he suggests, by being inscribed in our bodies at a level of habit, naturalized in a way that is stubbornly resistant to suggestions of thinking otherwise. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche tells the story of the practice of what he calls mankind’s self-imposed “mnemotechnics,” a tale that both recalls *Leviathan* and anticipates *The Penal Colony*. Nietzsche speculates that humanity’s techniques for fostering regularity in the individual and, by extension, society, “were not precisely gentle.” In fact, the cultivation of memory hearkens back to what is “most fearful and uncanny in the whole history of man.” “Man,” he assumes, “could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself,” for if “something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in, only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the memory.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” from *Untimely Meditations*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 63.

¹¹⁶ Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense,” 44.

¹¹⁷ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 61

a few ideas are to be rendered inextinguishable, ever-present, unforgettable, “fixed,” with the aim of hypnotizing the entire nervous and intellectual system with these “fixed ideas” – and ascetic procedures and modes of life are means of freeing these ideas from the competition of all other ideas, so as to make them “unforgettable.”¹¹⁸

One can look to “the severity of penal codes” as a “measure of the degree of effort needed ... to impose a few primitive demands of social existence as present realities upon these slaves of momentary affect and desire.”¹¹⁹

Nietzsche’s insight is that mnemotechnic power does not merely rely on the imposed strictures of an overt violence; it can also be inculcated by gentler means, located at other nodes of corporeal response. He famously points to the attitude engendered by the morality of the Christian West as a particularly important and clever manifestation of such a code. What he calls Christianity’s “morality of mores” in part presents the great effort by humanity to inculcate in itself a capacity for deferred gratification. Christianity, a “Platonism for the people,” had waged war on the barbarisms of the passions by subjecting the individual to a confessional logic that exerted its force beyond the actual act of confession. The logic of the confessional, entwined with questions about one’s ultimate meaning, and with assurances about one’s salvation, served to powerfully (self)regulate the behavior and the thoughts of believers; Christianity successfully mapped out the body by isolating the passions as dangers to be avoided or sublimated to the love of God. This mnemotechnic inscription would serve, therefore, to “install” a structure of belief, “in the feelings.” Christianity was a successful

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Platonism for the masses because it made sin hurt (or, in a later stage of decadence, at least uncomfortable) and it assigned to revelation the possibility of an active pleasure (or, in later stages of addiction, at least contentment).

Foucault will seize upon this Nietzschean insight in explaining modern disciplinary society in terms of the lingering effects of a “pastoral power” that originated in Christian institutions. Christianity, Foucault argues, did more than create a new ethical code; it also “proposed and spread new power relations throughout the ancient world.” Pastoral power, as an historical practice, aimed at the eternal salvation of the individual soul. The experience of this power is uniquely amplified by its willingness to divest its own interests for the good of the flock. Thus divested, pastoral power is experienced as interior, and it is in this interior realm that pastoral power seeks to consolidate and extend its effects. It “cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people’s minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets.” Foucault recognizes that Christian institutions have “lost their vitality,” but he argues that “its function has spread and multiplied” into other areas since the eighteenth century.¹²⁰ Foucault spent much of his intellectual career trying to identify and understand these other areas – in his archaeologies and genealogies of the prison, the school, medicine, psychiatry, and of particular importance for our concerns, sexuality.¹²¹

This logic of inscription points to the corporeal and material surface where the “subject” and the “social” are written together, marking out the movement of desire in relationship to a series of constraints, nodes and trajectories inscribed on the body.

¹²⁰ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 213 – 14.

¹²¹ . Foucault, like Nietzsche, finds similar truth-producing machines at work in earlier historical epochs. Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” in *The Foucault Reader*, 366.

Elizabeth Grosz felicitously summarizes this logic in terms of a thought experiment. She asks us to “think of subjectivity as a flat surface,” with the mind being the inside of this plane and the body being the outside plane, upon which interior motives and external forces are etched. The psychical writing on the inside of this plane is not itself disembodied; it “retraces the paths of biological processes using libido and desire as its marker-pen.” The outside plane of this subject is, by contrast, engraved with “the tracing of pedagogical, juridical, medical and economic imperatives, laws and practices,” producing a social subject “capable of labour, of production, and of manipulation.”¹²²

By appropriating and extending Nietzsche’s insights into the processes of mnemotechnic inscription, Foucault has played an instrumental role in making Nietzsche’s thought available to and active within our feminist, socialist, and democratic imaginations. For both thinkers, power (whose proximity to “desire” should not be minimized) is a fundamental category, but Foucault’s work has directly focused our investigations on the pragmatic effect, rather than the monistic force, of power. In fact, Foucault has said that the goal of his work was not been so much “to analyze the phenomenon of power” as it was “to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made into subjects.”¹²³ Foucault’s archaeological/genealogical approach thus “problematicizes man’s relation to the present, man’s historical mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous

¹²² Elizabeth Grosz, “Nietzsche and the Stomach for Knowledge,” 49. Elsewhere, she defines the “body” as “a concrete, material, animate organization of flesh, organs, nerves, and skeletal structure, which are given a unity, cohesiveness, and form through the psychical and social inscription of the body’s surface.” “Bodies-Cities,” in *Space, Time, Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 104.

¹²³ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *Michel Foucault*, edited by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), .

being.”¹²⁴ Those analyses reveal the link between modern notions of individuality and the exercise of power; that position, where one finds oneself enunciated by the normalizing forces of discursive practices, is what Foucault means when he speaks of our “subjectivization” or “subjectification.”¹²⁵ Foucault, of course, became increasingly interested how these processes of subject formation are tied to our self-understandings as sexual (and if we can allow the imbrication, desiring) beings.

Fascinatingly, Foucault (still largely tracking Nietzsche) offers a way of thinking about interior experience in a way that calls the primacy of interiority into question. The general movement towards the limits that define our subjectivity remain an important source for Foucault’s sense of how emergent identities might begin to fashion their voices within dominant forms of ethical and political discourse. That is, Foucault pursues the possibility of an affirmative response to our “subjectification” in terms of something like desire – in terms of a movement towards something one wants, glimmering (always) beyond final comprehension. Foucault imagines cultivating this disposition as a “mode of relating to contemporary reality,” as a way “of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task. A bit no doubt, like what the Greeks called an *ēthos*.”¹²⁶ This *ēthos* is bound up with transgression in that it is articulated at ““the contemporary limits of the necessary.””¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 309.

¹²⁵ Paul Rabinow uses this term in his summary of Foucault’s ethical project. (1994, xxx-xxxiii). See also Foucault’s essay, “Subjectivity and Truth,” in the same volume (1994a)

¹²⁶ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” trans. by Catherine Porter, in *The Foucault Reader*, 39. Nietzsche noted that “Philosophy as the art of discovering truth: according to Aristotle. Contradicted by the Epicureans, who made use of Aristotle’s sensualistic theory of knowledge: they rejected the search for truth with irony; ‘Philosophy as an art of living.’” Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 449 (Spring-Fall, 1887), 247.

¹²⁷ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 312.

It is important to note how this Foucauldian iteration of Nietzschean thought offers a pragmatic resource for troubling the desire constitutive of the western, masculine subject and its interlocking dreams of freedom and mastery. Tacking closely to Nietzsche's contention that the idea of absolute freedom is an absurdity, Foucault disabuses us of our unproblematicized faith of the interiority of that thinking by insisting that thinking always occurs in contexts that constrain and in relationship to flows of forces that disrupt any such interior space. By denying any such pure space, Foucault distinguishes his Nietzschean project from the utopian dream of escaping the historical circumstances that oppress us. Such a dream, in positing a final resting place finally beyond flux and contestation, ignores the ways in which even the promise and fulfillment of that dream continually reconfigure the boundaries of who we are, effectively resituating, rather than liberating, us in any total or final way. Transgression, for Foucault, is, therefore, not so much a fantasy of escape as it is an effort "to promote new forms of subjectivity through" an ongoing and always problematic "refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries." The task "nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are."¹²⁸ Paul Rabinow, in fact, has pointed out that "transgression is a word that Foucault does not employ in his later work."¹²⁹ Rather, Foucault speaks of transfiguration, of "work done at the limits of ourselves" that refuses "to settle for the affirmation or the empty dream of freedom."¹³⁰ That work, according to Rabinow, "tests the limits of society, and of the self." It is "a

¹²⁸ Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 216.

¹²⁹ Paul Rabinow, "Introduction: The History of Systems of Thought," in *Michel Foucault, Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1977), xxxii.

¹³⁰ Foucault, "What is Enlightenment," as quoted in Rabinow, xxxii – xxxiii.

⁶² Rabinow, xxxiii.

determination of what it is desirable and possible to change.”¹³¹ The hermeneutic impulse, the pragmatic understanding of identity, that continues to echo in Foucault’s Nietzschean thinking is assayed as a contestation of the limits that it diagnoses. Here, Nietzschean thought draws the political into close proximity with questions of meaning.

VI. Meaning

This pragmatic appropriation of Foucault’s Nietzschean mode of thought is not merely a tactical tool; it allows us to raise questions about human meaning in a post-enlightenment, post-religious world. As we will stress in greater detail in chapter five above, Nietzschean resignifications of desire, precisely because they draw together the physiological and ideational experiences of “meaning” in a way that contests the sovereign power of that meaning, can function in ways that fortify the health of liberal, multicultural, and radically democratic alternatives to the disciplinary forms of late modern capitalism. Nietzschean thought decenters the interior certitude of “meaning,” and, in doing so, helps us to reconceive our approach to questions of meaning in ways that are consonant with a postmetaphysical political ethos.

Nietzsche locates, in the ultimate opacity of the body, a site where the questions of meaning that had been resolved and displaced by the inculcated perspective of Christianity could now be located. According to Nietzsche, the effort to think God, to bring him into a realm of calculation, had killed God, deracinating the vital distance that had once made the encounter with God a meaningful experience. But though the architecture of a rational subjectivity had been constructed in order to “free man from his self-incurred tutelage,” it actually reproduces the encounter with a radically alterior God as something that happens on the “inside,” at a limit of our subjectivity. The questions of

meaning that had traditionally been addressed by the church are now, with the death of God, problems that are formulated and mediated with reference to a self. This site of “meaning,” understood here as an encounter with that which is anterior to thought, is made manifest in a transferal in “which the death of God leads to an experience in which nothing may again announce the exteriority of being, and consequently to an experience which is interior.”¹³² The experience of the sacred in terms of a living god has given way to the search for an authentic inner experience. Though both Nietzsche and Foucault recognize an inherent nihilistic futility in this latest displacement of Christian/Platonic thinking, Nietzsche’s thought, particularly as it is clarified by Foucault’s articulation of a “limit attitude,” proceeds as an experiment on the possibility of “meaning” at the site of these inscribed self-understandings.

The topography of our thinking, Nietzsche suggests, is constituted by the mnemotechnically engrained limits against which *its* questions of meaning arise. Our thought, inscribed in a way that simultaneously marks that which exceeds immediate rational accountability, *feels* precisely at these points. It moves toward and hovers at these spaces of what Foucault calls a “possible transgression” in configuring the stories by which the individual gives meaning to his or her existence. Nietzschean observations in this regard are particularly interesting because it links the cybernetic construction of the social individual, the herd animal, with the individual’s confrontation with his or her meaning, thus drawing out a relationship between the political and the religious.¹³³

¹³² Foucault, “The Preface to Transgression,” from *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, trans. by Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 32.

¹³³ For a sustained consideration of a Nietzschean thinking’s effectiveness for negotiating the continued importance of meaning in a post-metaphysical socio-political landscape, see William Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

In Nietzsche's thought, the desire that had been sublimated within, and made subordinate to, the overarching imperatives of a Christian metaphysics remains an important limit space in its own right within the economy of his individual understanding. For Nietzsche, the Platonic and Christian responses to the problem of meaning, though ingenious and necessary in their own right, were ultimately life denying and dishonest, evidence of humanity's still cowardly immaturity. Nietzsche demeans the Platonic/Christian effort to domesticate the force of desire, to return it to its place within the structure of a noble lie about "the just." In order to create a new self-understanding, Nietzsche's thought suggests, one must rethink the relationship between desire and meaning. For the "Nietzsche" who emerges here, the question of "woman" as the question of sexual difference, and the actual and tropical heterosexuality that this implies, forms an important limit within his self-understanding. As Foucault recognized, in the context of his more general concern with "the history of subjectivity," "the question of sex and sexuality" is a particularly "privileged case" in which "the subject experiences himself in a game of truth where he relates to himself" as "a domain of possible knowledge."¹³⁴ Particularly within the last century, Foucault argues, the explosion of discourse around the question of sexuality has become a fundamental, almost unavoidable site in the construction of our meaning. It has become something to die for.

¹³⁴ Maurice Florence, "Foucault" trans. by Robert Hurley, in Rabinow, 461. Florence is actually Foucault, writing pseudonymously. Though recognizing that Foucault and Florence are the same person in some ways authorizes this summary of Foucault's project, it also reminds us of Foucault's ongoing challenge to oversimplified notions of authorial authority and the faith in interiority on which this notion of authority rests. See, for example, his essay "What is an Author?", in *Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology* (The New Press: New York, 1998), 205 – 222.

VII. Desire as Transformative Multiplicity

Desire (and the constellation of terms such as instinct, energy, and power that function similarly in Nietzsche's thought) is amongst our most intriguing constitutive limits. For it is in its ontological face, experienced as an ineluctable movement that exceeds any boundary, that desire provides the impetus for its own post-ontological reconceptualization. In his notes, Nietzsche suggests that

The will to power can manifest itself only against resistances; therefore it seeks that which resists it – this is the primeval tendency of the protoplasm when it extends pseudopodia and feels about. Appropriation and assimilation are above all a desire to overwhelm, a forming, shaping and reshaping, until at length that which has been overwhelmed has entirely gone over into the power domain of the aggressor and has increased the same.¹³⁵

Nietzsche asks us to enter into an experiment by assuming a truth – that the truth is beyond our ability to conceptualize it – without merely extolling the monistic power of that “truth.” For Nietzsche, far from thinking that thinking could re-present this “truth” and thus verify it, makes us aware that the desire of his thinking (for a truth whose truth is that truth cannot be conceptualized) is necessarily implicated in a paradox: “‘Change’ belongs to the essence, therefore also temporality: with this, however, the necessity of change has only been posited once more conceptually.”¹³⁶ In “the extreme case,” he recognizes, those who come to recognize this gap between representation and the truth of the world would be doomed “to come to an untimely end.” Such “a man no longer believes in his own existence; he sees everything fly past in an eternal succession and

¹³⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 656 (Spring – Fall 1887), 346.

¹³⁶ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 1064 (1885), 547.

looses himself in the stream of becoming. At last, the logical disciple of Heraclitus, he will hardly dare to raise a finger.”¹³⁷

Yet Nietzsche does not respond in his time to these desperate circumstances by not writing. Nietzsche’s thought of the will to power may be an unceasing monism (what Bataille would characterize as the “general economy”), but because any phenomenon is only understandable in terms of the effects that it produces, this power is only particular, only that which differentiates itself. This being the case, power can be thought of in terms of trajectories whose movement across a social field, and the socially striated space of our “subjectivity,” maps our possible identities. In fact, it seems that something like desire continues to account for the genealogical attitude and the ethos of contestation endorsed by both Nietzsche and his heirs.

The encounter with the limit, and particularly the limit of desire, should not be thought of as an encounter with something that merely constrains. Again, such a conceptualization tends to imagine freedom in terms of a total escape, of an ability to break on through to the other side; it associates freedom with a vulgar desire. As we argued above, such an understanding of freedom is inimical to Nietzsche’s philosophical project. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault, rather than rail against the repression of our natural desire, follows a Nietzschean trajectory by turning our attention towards the strategic opportunities of the discursive practice of “sexuality.” Our “sexuality,” he argues, is not something that has been repressed by particular social practices; it “appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power ... Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the

¹³⁷ Nietzsche, as quoted in Strong, 51.

greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies.”¹³⁸

Thus maybe we have been taking the wrong tack in reading Nietzsche, particularly if it is his relationship to “woman,” and the desire of his thinking, that we want to approach. The work of creating oneself responds to one’s “subjectification” as an assaying forth. Rather than tie Nietzsche to his thought as if to some Procrustean bed, fatally constituting and fixing his thinking in its proper philosophical-historical niche, it may be more productive to ambulate him, to let his thought loose within our critical thinking in order to experiment with the productive potential of that thinking. Deleuze¹³⁹ and Guattari, in seeking to rethink desire by mapping it on to Nietzsche’s thinking of the will to power, have articulated this ambulation as a productive alternative to the patient-therapist relationship maintained by Freudian discourses. “A schizophrenic out for a walk,” they tell us, “is a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst’s couch.”¹⁴⁰ And here, in offering their alternative to Freudian thought (and the reterritorializing understanding of desire on which that thought rests), they are merely echoing Nietzsche’s own attitudes about the intractable relationship between thinking and physiology, thought and activity. Nietzsche, ever alert to the physiological dimensions of thinking, had himself, in fact, proclaimed the superiority of “walking thought,” equating Flaubert’s preference for thinking and writing while sitting with nihilism. “Only *ideas won by*

¹³⁸ Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980), 103.

¹³⁹ When asked, in a late interview, if his kinship with Deleuze extends to the Deleuzian notion of desire, Foucault responded, “No, definitely not.” Nonetheless, Foucault’s insistence that power, as it manifests itself in particular sites of resistance, is always productive, draws their (neo)Nietzschean thought into close proximity to one another. Foucault, “Structuralism and Post-Structuralism,” in *Foucault: Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, 446.

¹⁴⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 2.

walking,” he emphasizes, “have any value.”¹⁴¹ “Sit as little as possible; give no credence to any thought that was not born outdoors while one moved about freely.”¹⁴²

Having worked through a Nietzschean inspired “limit attitude,” we have a tool for (re)reading Nietzsche’s thinking. We are beginning to recognize how Nietzsche’s thinking teaches a strategy of reading, writing, and living, making available new capacities to his readers. The desire for “woman” that traverses Nietzsche’s thought, as we have seen, is a productive limit, or space, where Nietzsche engages in a constant contestation of that which organizes and verifies his own thought.

In at least one of its iterations, Nietzsche’s thinking traces the possibility (rather than the simple consummation) of its own overcoming. Nietzsche's encounters with the feminine and with "woman" encourage a rethinking of his own misogyny. It marks a place where priority is “given to the sublimated or outcast ideas in the metaphysical tradition.” Such “discursive elements have formed part of the initiation of the language of difference, not contemplative or ritual events of union, not rhetorical harmony, not desires for appropriateness on the part of aspects of obedience to special authorities or texts, not experiences of sameness pervasive in differences.”¹⁴³

A possible overturning of Nietzsche's misogyny is therefore enacted in his thought by his metaphorical linking of "woman" with the "truth."¹⁴⁴ If we remember that metaphor suggests a transformation a carrying across of meaning (and if we remember that metaphor cannot be merely a metaphor in Nietzsche’s thinking, that writing is not

¹⁴¹ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 26.

¹⁴² *Ecce Homo*, 239 – 40.

¹⁴³ Charles Scott, *The Language of Difference*, Humanities Press International, Inc.: Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1989), 91.

¹⁴⁴ “Perhaps truth is a woman.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 38.

merely ideational but rather a process that occurs on the body in processes that we have associated with mnemotechnic inscription), we can understand Nietzsche's writing as an invitation to explore this metaphorical juncture in a way that transforms our conventional understanding of "woman" and "truth." In coming to recognize that claims to understand truth in its totality ignore that all such claims occur from a situated and thus partial perspective, Nietzsche thus also comes to conclude that what is certain about "woman" (the feminine) is that, as Derrida puts it, she "does not allow herself to be possessed."¹⁴⁵

Nietzsche's insistent proclamations about women, therefore, are permeated by the ironizing effect of "woman's" epistemological distance. For this is just how Nietzsche frames his comments about "a few truths about 'woman as such.'" He assumes that it will be understood "from the outset how very much these are after all only – *my* truths."¹⁴⁶ The experiences of "woman" that appear throughout Nietzsche's work mark the limit of a particular experience, a particular dramatic event where the task of overcoming makes itself manifest in his thinking through the positing of a difference that resists assimilation.

Debra Berghoffen does a good job of drawing these Deleuzean and Derridean inflected strands of "Nietzschean desire" together. She suggests that the question of sexual difference thematized by Nietzsche's repeated comparisons of "woman" with "truth," "wisdom" and "life" troubles Freudian-Oedipal understandings of desire. Nietzsche's thinking steps "outside the Oedipal regime," and "calls on us to orient our desire around the abyss, the hole between the drive and its object ... to affirm the drive

¹⁴⁵ Jacques Derrida, "The Question of Style" in *The New Nietzsche* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 179.

¹⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 162.

rather than the object and teaches us to value the gap that sustains the drive's production of objects."¹⁴⁷ Two important possibilities can be tied to Berghoffen's assertion here: first, by casting the problem of desire as the problem of woman, Nietzsche initiates a rethinking of desire in a way that subverts the Oedipal structure of desire with which we originally tried to corral him in the opening sections of this chapter. We can only plead that given the habits of reading and thinking in which we began, it felt right. Second, Nietzsche's contestation of his desire (and the misogyny that this desire entails) invokes a respect for the radical alterity of that which is itself outside of his thought (such as "truth," or the "woman" he desires). In contrast to his misogyny, the contestatory introspection enacted in Nietzsche's thought suggests that masculine desire can be more nobly reconfigured.¹⁴⁸ This thread of Nietzsche's thought suggests that man should not seek to contain the woman he pursues in her totality; he should not insist on converting her voice into his truth.¹⁴⁹ Nietzsche, in fact, seems to write in a way that confirms the valuation of difference staged in his encounter with "woman"; "... unlike the heirs of Oedipus who approach the woman truth as a riddle to be mastered or as an origin to be simultaneously recognized and silenced, Nietzsche identifies himself as a lover of

¹⁴⁷ Debra B. Bergoffen, "Oedipal Dramas," *Why Nietzsche Still?: Reflections on Drama, Culture, and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 25.

¹⁴⁸ "The source of the great power of the noble life, its welcoming openness to what comes, to what presents itself, lies in that it has the power to forget, to forget the past, to forget what is irrevocable, to let what dies die." Alphonso Lingis, "The Will to Power," in *The New Nietzsche*, ed. by David Allison (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1977), 53.

¹⁴⁹ In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche recounts the story of a sage that who declaims, against the received understanding of the crowd, that "It is men' ... who corrupt women; and all the failing of women should be atoned by and improved in men. For it is man who creates for himself the image of woman, and woman forms herself according to this image." The sage concludes, "Men need to be educated better!" Of course, the sage is dismissed as a fool. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 126.

riddles.”¹⁵⁰ Thus, “Listening to Nietzsche, we learn that solving the riddle will not resolve our desire.”¹⁵¹

This emergent disposition within Nietzsche’s thought, emerging out of the misogynist *ressentiment* that mars his thought provides, therefore, an important *affirmative* resource for contemporary men as they encounter the ever changing roles that women occupy in late 20th Century society. Nietzsche's example might provide a resource for combating the kinds of backlash against feminism and women that presently resounds through popular discourse. As men, we would not punish women for not fulfilling the roles that we assume that they should fill – rather, we would, aspiring toward a Nietzschean nobility, affirm the right of women to become "who they are." In doing so, Nietzsche suggests to we late modern men a way of fulfilling the Dionysian demands of his thinking: we might seek out a meaning for our lives that inveighs against the chaotic nihilism of modernity in ways that insists on not losing sight of the utterly pragmatic basis of that response.¹⁵²

VIII. Conclusion

Reading Nietzsche with an eye towards his treatment of “woman” is suggestive of the place of a Nietzschean inflected “critical desire” within contemporary critical thought. First, Nietzsche’s attentiveness to the specific context of his desire and how that desire marks the geography of his thinking stages a confrontation with that which is “other” than his thought. Nietzsche’s thinking alerts us to the danger of forgetting that our identity structures, regardless of their persuasive power, are perspectives. These

¹⁵⁰ Berghoffen, 23. (cf. Z:3 “The Other Dancing Song).

¹⁵¹ Berghoffen, 24.

¹⁵² “In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche defines the dionysian quite carefully. It means having knowledge that all form is man-given, and that there are no limits or categories, knowable or unknowable in ‘nature.’” Strong, 140.

structures, in Nietzschean thought, become sites of an aesthetic-political contestation, sites where identities essential to reproducing a received way of life can become the site of “a possible transgression.” By focusing our thinking on the difference that permeates our thought, of the way “truth,” by necessity, is bound up with “lie,” Nietzsche opens our thought to possibility of seeing our thought differently. We are open to hearing the inevitable contestation of our certainties. Thus Nietzsche’s thinking of the question of “woman” solicits the spiritual *fatum* of his thought by opening that thought to an outside that it cannot contain. It reveals that the very desire that draws Nietzsche towards “woman,” the desire that naturalizes and justifies an attitude of control and capture, is enmeshed in an economy of deferral that interrupts desire’s inevitable ends.

Though an interpretation of Nietzsche’s thought is offered in these pages (one which no doubt pursues its own specific desires), the “truth” of that interpretation is less important than the encounters that it stages. Between his aristocratic politics and a politics of leftist intervention. Between man/men and woman/women. Between the liberal principle of neutrality and the evocation of radical difference. Between identity and dissolution, determinism and freedom. Between author and text. These encounters proliferate, and they are but some of the disjunctures within our thought, knots that mark the contours of our identities that our co-meditations with Nietzsche bring to light. To think with Nietzsche is to avoid dichotomizing these tensions, of only being able to think in terms of a structural economy of exclusions in which one term’s absolute mastery is secured by canceling out the rights of the other. Nietzsche allows us to think of these tensions as spaces of constellation, in which all terms within its semantic space are diffracted by the differing encounters of these elements within that space. This not only

suggests that each term is fundamental to the identity that gains coherence from such a constellated space, from the tensions that are sustained within that space, it also suggests that each term always interrupts any attempt to finally resolve these organizing tensions. The desire of this thought, therefore, is plural.

In the space of this interruption, in the space of “woman” that diffracts this thought, Nietzsche’s thought might be able to hear a thinking that it has hitherto excluded. Perhaps, the voice that would now speak is the voice of “woman.” Nietzsche’s relationship to “woman,” however, signals more than an attentiveness to a generalizable “other” that exceeds the calculation of our thought. Nietzsche’s desire for “woman,” imbricated with his longing for specific women, echoes the impossibility of a thinking immune to its encounters with concrete others. Nietzsche’s thought can never clear Nietzsche from misogyny, or from other forms of fascism, but his encounter with “woman” (and the form of desire that is implicated in this encounter) initiates a movement of difference that informs his own efforts to write differently, to give to thinking a nomadic dimension that always exceeds the codifying efforts of thinking. His thought carries within it a self-rewriting, self-subverting quality that remains one of our most insistent ways of thinking back against the seeming inevitable moments of identity in which we are all ensnared. The encounter that we have traced in Nietzsche’s thought, we will argue in chapters four and five below, is therefore instructive for the way in which feminist and critical political practice is articulated in a post-Stalinist world. As Deleuze suggests, Nietzsche’s legacy of nomadic thought turns our thinking towards this critical adventure: “We also know that the problem for revolutionaries today is to unite

within the purpose of the particular struggle without falling into the despotic and bureaucratic organization of the party or state apparatus.”¹⁵³

Yet Nietzsche’s own problematization of total freedom (which we have associated with the ignobling dream of a consumptive desire) warns us not to think that we critical theorists can unproblematically assimilate Nietzsche’s thinking within critical theory. His suspicions of feminism, socialism and democracy make us critical theorists suspicious of him, and, it seems, the best that we can do is to enter into an agonistic relationship with a “Nietzsche” whose own truth remains beyond assimilation. We should try instead to cultivate an agonistic relationship with his thinking, engaging in a Nietzschean form of friendship by insisting on a certain set of oppositions that nonetheless values the kinship that draws us together.

We suggest that we organize these oppositions by asking our own Nietzschean questions of Nietzsche. What is it that secretly motivates him to give such a central place to the question of woman/truth in his thought? What is it that motivates him to describe “woman” in such a way as to describe the characteristics of his own writing? We might follow Berghoffen, for example, who, after celebrating Nietzsche’s thinking for being able “to step out of the circle of the logic of sacrifice,” admits to a suspicion (echoing the coded “Nietzsches” interpreted within Freudian and Heideggerean softwares earlier in this chapter) that Nietzsche cannot escape “the Oedipal scene.” As she notes: “If Nietzsche supposed that truth was a woman and the world was a fable, he also supposed that it was as truth that she awaited the warrior’s (but not the dogmatic philosopher’s)

¹⁵³ Deleuze, “Nomad Thought,” 148.

seduction. This fable sounds too familiar. The phallus, it seems, is not easily abandoned. It has its own routes of return.”¹⁵⁴

We should follow this suspicion in troubling the neat conclusion to which this chapter has seemingly been leading, that somehow in Nietzschean thinking a movement is initiated to let woman speak from across the divide that he and I have been unable (unwilling) to hear. In the space that I have wanted to keep a space, a language that has been other (I’ve been hoping to say) begins to articulate itself, to make itself heard. Perhaps what he teaches (or what we might learn) in the tracing of the encounter of “woman” in his thought is that this language of an “other” is a language that one can’t simply demand. Maybe it is that language that allows the conversation with the other to occur as a conversation with the other, not as an act of assimilation but as a movement in which the other retains a singularity.

But woman has not yet spoken. Nietzsche’s thought, in fact, perhaps only elides the question of “woman.” If this thinking within the (at least immediately) monological logic of desire is what makes Nietzsche’s thought exemplary for a narrative which seeks to speak about and for women, it is also the reason that this thought must be questioned from an outside that it, through its strategies of deferral, has elided. For the metaphorical conflation of woman and truth as objects of desire that cannot be captured tends to only reinforce the mystification of “woman.” Despite our admiration of Nietzsche’s hesitation before her, it is clear that she does not speak.

Yes, his thought thematizes the elusive nature of that which is other than our thought. And yes, his suggestions about the obstinacy of the “other” alerts us to the tendency of any economy of thought to reduce experience to its terms, in part by

¹⁵⁴ Berghoffen, 26.

excluding this “other” from its thinking as an assumption whose “truth” is no longer contestable. But one wonders if the constant deferment of woman isn’t, for Nietzsche, a way of maintaining *his* truth, a way of allowing him to maintain his monologue about a truth that is always sought but which is never attained. If that’s the case, it seems like the deterritorialization of his thought merely serves to maintain the abstraction of an exchange. “Woman” remains subordinated, in Nietzsche’s thought, as a purely abstract difference that can be exchanged between men. The distance maintains the abstract power of “woman” for man.

In the following chapter, we explore this charge more fully by examining Luce Irigaray’s amorous contestation of Nietzsche’s thinking. Irigaray joins others in calling our attention to how associating the “truth” (of the nontruth of truth) with “woman” functions to reinstate the misogyny that Nietzsche’s epistemic humility would seem to militate against. The drama played out in Nietzsche’s comparison of “truth” and “woman” replay an old story of masculine mastery, one that cunningly elevates woman in the positions of her servitude. How can Nietzsche hear her speak? Or are there other models for this communication? Come. “Zarathustra is a dancer.” But always this final question: will Zarathustra remember that he will not dance the tarantella?¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 102. See also Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, Translated by Duncan Lange (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 69-75. This confluence and disjuncture between “webbing,” “weaving,” and “dancing” needs to be developed, but the suggestive point is that dancing suggests a way of communication whose give and take escapes the logic of capture ensconced in a still monological thinking’s web. What would such dancing entail, how would it be done well?.

Chapter 3: She Said, She Said: Irigaray and the Demand of Intersubjective Desire

I. Deferral Interruptus: The Desire of Confrontation

To this point, we have tried to pin down Nietzsche's thought, only to find that the "Nietzsche" we examine is one whose identity involves the ongoing complication of identity. We have intimated, in fact, that this complication of identity reveals the epistemological-structural inevitability of a moment of ethics within his thought, and that this moment of interruption, as the basis of Nietzsche's project of overcoming the subjective reality of "his truths," speaks within the ambit of a masculine desire in a way that might allow males to begin to hear women in ways that have been hitherto impossible. Nietzsche helps us to imagine an encounter with the other of "woman" and, by extension, the concrete women and others whom we encounter from within the (at least immediately) solipsistic experience of masculine desire. He suggests, through his metaphorical conflation of "truth" and "woman," how some of men's own most cherished assumptions about their identity as desiring beings already draws their thinking into an unexpected relationship with women. Nietzsche himself, as Derrida has suggested, thus ironically unseats the identity constituting notion of desire that turns men to the ever elusive figures of "woman" and "truth." In offering the site of "woman," or the feminine, as keys to his thinking, Nietzsche draws us into a game in which his true identity as a thinker remains elusive, and which therefore deigns to seduce us by occupying the position of "truth"/"woman." The general structure of this Nietzschean encounter (which is both the encounter of his thinking with "woman"/"truth" and our encounter with a "Nietzsche" who writes in the hand of "woman") is exemplary for our

encounters with others across a wide range of variously similar (though never completely identical) encounters.¹⁵⁶

If this thinking within an immediately masculine desire is what makes Nietzsche's thought exemplary for a narrative that seeks to speak to and about women from an immediately masculine perspective, it is also the reason that this thought must be questioned from an outside that it, through its strategies of deferral, must always elide. For the metaphorical conflation of "woman" and "truth" as objects of desire that cannot be captured might, through a certain critical lens, only reinforce the mystification of "woman."

Luce Irigaray's amorous contestation of Nietzsche's thought draws his/our attention to this blindspot within what she sees as his still masculine thinking. Though the intensity of Nietzsche's own thought ridicules the fatuous desires of the "last man" produced by modernity's transformation of a Christian world-view, Irigaray's critique suggests that Nietzsche's thinking is itself still unable to cast aside the underlying logic of that desire. To say it quickly: despite her admiration of Nietzsche's hesitation before "woman," it is clear to Irigaray that "woman" does not speak. Nietzsche's efforts to profess love, to articulate his desire, she suggests, remains (t)autological, unable to draw out the ethical promise that we have begun to glimpse in Nietzsche's thinking.

¹⁵⁶ The focus on heterosexual relations stops short of the more broadly inclusive kinds of politics that I endorse; this focus should be thought of as a starting point that begins to open up the subjective ground of predominant notions of desire and the deleterious political consequences sustained by those notions. It remains that the social roles governed by the stereotypical categories of patriarchy mark out a ground upon which identity is negotiated and contested. Even given the explosions in transgender culture since the 1970s, the scene is much the as it was in the 1940s: "To go for a walk with one's eyes open is enough to demonstrate that humanity is divided into two classes of individuals whose clothes, faces, bodies, smiles, gaits, interests, and occupations are manifestly different. Perhaps these differences are superficial, perhaps they are destined to disappear. What is certain is that right now they do most obviously exist." Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. by H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), xx – xxxi.

Given this challenge, can we call Irigaray's thought Nietzschean? Is it proper to rehearse her place in the development of a Nietzschean inflected critical theory? There is little question that there is a relationship between them; Irigaray has explicitly thematized the question of Nietzsche's place in (relationship to) her thinking. In the imagined conversations and addresses of *Marine Lover*, Irigaray draws our attention to the limit, or the interval, that arises within and between their thought. There remains, however, disagreement about the precise nature of their relationship. Kelly Oliver, in *Womanizing Nietzsche*, goes so far as to suggest that *Marine Lover* "is written as the final love-letter to end a bittersweet affair, because the addressee, the male lover, is incapable of marrying/marrying an-other; he loves only himself."¹⁵⁷ Irigaray herself, however, suggests that this overdraws the spirit of critique, mishears the tempo that animates *Marine Lover*. According to her, Nietzsche is for her "a partner in a love relationship."¹⁵⁸ Nor is it quite right, she claims, to call it a love-hate relationship. Rather, she is careful to say that it "is a call and refusal," and that she doesn't "believe that it's necessary to call it hate."¹⁵⁹

So perhaps the question of whether her thought is Nietzschean is misplaced, is already a misunderstanding of what is at stake in *Marine Lover*, already a privileging of Nietzsche's thought as original and seminal, and Irigaray's as merely derivative and receptive. To call her thought Nietzschean would only reproduce a masculine understanding of relationship that Irigaray's work seeks to diagnose and contest. In fact, *Marine Lover* is centrally occupied with questions about how to love the other(s) to

¹⁵⁷ Kelly Oliver, *Womanizing Nietzsche, : Philosophy's Relation to the Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 83 – 84.

¹⁵⁸ Luce Irigaray, , *Le Corps-à-corps avec la mere* (Paris: editions de la Pleine Lune, 19821), as quoted in Tamsin Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy*, 49.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

whom we are drawn and to whom we are committed. Irigaray takes up what we have isolated as an important legacy of Nietzsche's own project – the effort to imagine a generally proper mode of comportment towards the objects of our desire, such as “woman” and “truth” – and troubles it in the spirit of difference by which it proceeds.

Perhaps, then, in the spirit of a questioning, critical desire that animates this narrative, it is better to begin by asking what draws Irigaray to Nietzsche. What is it in his thinking that she finds so worthy of her attention? What is it in his thinking that compels her to pay him the highly Nietzschean compliment of a studied opposition? We might immediately say that what draws their thinking into proximity with one another is a shared concern with the paradox of post-consumptive desire: thinking's recognition of who/that which it must think but which resists assimilation. He won't quite get it right (which, of course, would be to get it all wrong), but the promise of a post-consumptive, post-dialectical mode of encounter is operative in Nietzsche's thought, and Nietzsche, as Irigaray appreciates, thematizes this effort as an encounter with sexual difference.

Nietzsche, she suggests, begins this thinking in the only language available to him, one that understands desire and love in terms of a presence of communion – sometimes ecstatic, sometimes more gently tempered – that always reduces the one that it encounters to an object that can be controlled. As such, she begins *Marine Lover* by addressing a *vous*, the generalized, impersonal “you” of a philosophical tradition that in its variations has always reduced the voice of “woman,” the feminine, to that of the other of the same. The feminine, as it has been understood in that tradition, has always served as the “the drum” in philosophy's “ear,” only “sending back to itself its own truth.”¹⁶⁰ In

¹⁶⁰ Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, translated by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 3.

the name of love, philosophy, and the political practice that it underpins or reflects, has sought to sustain the illusion of presence by denying the voice – sealing the lips – of that which can be blamed for an inevitable inconstancy. Philosophy has involved itself in a forgetting that paradoxically demands a constant vigilance (lest one remember): “And, certainly, the most arduous thing has been to seal my lips, out of love. To close off this mouth that has always sought to flow free.”¹⁶¹

Nietzsche, no doubt, tries to get somewhere different, to unseat the certainty of epistemic privilege that has tended to underwrite the organization of western thought, and it is this effort that has, in part, made his thought so attractive to those seeking to challenge the political mastery accorded to the supposedly neutral subjects privileged by scientific, liberal and patriarchal discourses. The Irigarayan protagonist of *Marine Lover* is charmed by this Nietzschean effort, and she soon turns from the impersonal address of the philosophical tradition in which Nietzsche’s thought remains enmeshed toward the particularity – the masculine “tu” – of his thinking. In Nietzsche, a thinker who would broach the opening of sexual difference within our intellectual traditions, the protagonist of *Marine Lover* senses a kinship and a possibility. In her encounter with Nietzsche, Irigaray articulates the possibility of a question, in relation to her love, about the distance that defines who they are. Irigaray takes the privileging of distance, and the rapturous time-out-of-time that it signifies, as a symptom of Nietzsche’s fear of intimacy, his denial of the feminine other upon whom he and all living beings necessarily depend. The switch to “tu” signals the troubling of that distance, a reminder that within Nietzsche’s masculine economy of distance, proximity and contiguity begins to unseat the spacing that ensures the master’s ideal of control.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 3.

Irigaray takes the proliferation of “woman” in Nietzsche’s thought as a sign that she shares with him a kindred intuition: that the seemingly irreducible asymmetry of the encounter of sexual difference permeates thought, imbuing its entirety with the possibilities and limits of an ethical encounter. Tacking along the trajectory of his texts, *Marine Lover* deflects Nietzsche’s thought in order to fulfill its promise of an ethics of difference. She sees in Nietzsche’s comparison of “woman” with “truth” an admirable effort to defrock thought’s pretensions of totality by articulating that thought as a *question* of desire. As it has been developed by Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze and Guattari, the desire of Nietzsche’s thinking, as a relationship of and to difference, both precedes that thinking and carries it beyond the locus of the subject, thus disrupting the subject’s absolute authority. The subject, and his or her desires, is, according to this generalized Nietzschean economy, written on and within the body via the limits that striate the social field that one occupies. But though notions of a socially constructed (desiring) self delimit and complicate notions of a voluntaristic free will, the Nietzschean picture of the subject does not point to the impossibility of agency. As we have argued in chapter two (and we will see it elaborated in the work of Judith Butler in the next chapter), the link between thinking and desire worked through in Nietzsche’s thought, rather than extirpating agency, turns that agency towards an ongoing interrogation of the previously unproblematic contours of the self. For Nietzsche, such an interrogation of the self is linked, paradoxically, to the possibility of self-creation. Nietzsche links acts of creation to acts of destruction – one must break open the sedimented grip of language, religion, and society on our self-understandings in order to create new spaces of conceptual possibility. Thus it is in the ongoing contestation of the limits of one’s

subjectivity that one engages in the ongoing creation of one's becoming. Nietzsche's thought, however, avoids many of the dangers of a merely aestheticized ethics by thematizing the encounter of the limits of our self-understandings as a *questioning* that maintains a respect for the elusive nature of that which is other than our thought. His suggestions about the obstinacy of the "other," therefore, alerts us to the tendency of any economy of thought to reduce experience to its terms by excluding this "other" from its thinking as an assumption whose "truth" is no longer contestable; coupled with Nietzsche's insistence on multiplicity, the general structure of encounter sketched out in Nietzsche's thinking suggests a mode of encountering concrete others that escapes our tendency to reduce our relationships to a series of means-ends calculations. The openness of this Nietzschean mode of encounter, and the suspicion of one's own experience that it initiates, is important to critically motivated theories of politics that have come to recognize that an ongoing interrogation of their own motivating assumptions is an entirely necessary component of their own political efforts.

Irigaray, however, asks Nietzsche, and all of those who turn to the critical power of his thinking, to hesitate before the disaggregating hesitation of his thought. The critical notion of desire worked up in his thought, she suggests, must itself be questioned. She asks us to question if the constant deferment of "woman" – as the "truth" that always remains beyond our grasp – isn't, for Nietzsche, a way of maintaining *his* truth, a way of allowing him to maintain his monologue about a truth that is always sought but which is never attained. Nietzsche's thought, she suggests, utilizes "woman" in order to enshrine the pathos of distance through the instantiation of a dramaturgical space that would perpetuate the moment of desire. "Woman"/"truth" is described by Nietzsche in such a

way as to preserve the solipsistic comfort and pleasure of a virtual spectator. There is in Nietzsche's thought an ongoing invocation to become who one is, to turn toward the moment of choice that now confronts us as the site of a dramatic ethical encounter;¹⁶² there remains, however, the threat of a certain blindness to the way in which a traditional, masculine logic of desire reasserts itself, despite the stubborn, self-referential resistance of the genealogist. For all of the Deleuzean inspired talk that Nietzsche's thinking is post-Oedipal in this regard, there is a way in which Nietzsche's thought, like Freud's, is inscribed in the same desire to control the unruly excesses that haunt our masculine calculations and pursuits.

Nietzsche, Irigaray intimates, is himself blind, or willfully forgetful, to the structure of meaning and allegiance in which he is entangled. From the critical perspective that she cultivates, the refusal to chase women allows Nietzsche to keep the very possibility of the chase, of an essential movement, within his thought alive. That maintenance, however, threatens a solipsistic tendency in Nietzsche's thinking. Reading that thinking from a necessarily (sexually) different perspective, seeing it from a certain distance, treating it as a totality that is yet to fulfill its own demands of corporeality and becoming, Irigaray reveals in the economy of Nietzsche's thinking an ascetic masturbational practice – putting the thought of desire into motion and then trying to maintain the interval of that movement in perpetuity.

If that's the case, it seems like the deterritorialization of his thought merely serves to maintain the abstraction of an exchange. Irigaray's interruption of the economy of

¹⁶² Deleuze, in fact, argues for the ethical dimension carried by the eternal return by comparing it to the rule of Kant's categorical imperative: "As an ethical thought the eternal return is the new formulation of the practical synthesis: *whatever you will, will it in such a way that you also will its eternal return.*" Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 68.

desire that sustains Nietzsche's thinking, then, draws our attention towards a structural critique of commodity capitalism which Nietzsche's own interruption of desire would seem to unwittingly abet.¹⁶³ She suggests that Nietzsche's treatment of "woman"/"truth" prefigures the crafting of an economy of desire in which beer, cars, clothes, computers, and even women are made available (and are pitched by women) as a substitute for a perpetually unavailable "woman." Alternatively, the labor of real women, of mothers and housewives, is occluded by Nietzsche: "what do you care if her back is broken by the weight, as long as she still has the strength to give that present back, in the shape of a sounding echo that the voice of her flesh fills out."¹⁶⁴ In either case, "Woman" remains subordinated, in Nietzsche's thought, as a purely abstract difference that can be exchanged between or is used by men. Nietzsche's celebration of woman's positioning in a pathos of distance maintains the abstract power of "woman" for man.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Irigaray repeatedly lodges a similar complaint when questioning psychoanalysis: "... psychoanalysis needs to reconsider the very limits of its theoretical and practical field, needs to detour through an 'interpretation' of the cultural background and the economy, particularly the political economy, that have marked it without its knowledge." *This Sex Which is Not One*, 66 – 67.

¹⁶⁴ Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 32. Irigaray, for example, notes some of the consequences of the fictive laws of a masculine genealogy (as it is sustained by Freud's analysis of the feminine): "... woman, whose intervention in the work of engendering the child can hardly be questioned becomes the anonymous worker, the machine in the service of a master-proprietor who will put his trademark upon the finished product. It does not seem exaggerated, incidentally, to understand quite a few products, and notable cultural produces, as a counter-part or a search for equivalents to woman's function in maternity. And the desire that men here displays to determine for himself what is constituted by "origin," and thereby eternally and ever to reproduce him (as) self, is a far from negligible indication of the same thing." Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, translated by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 23.

¹⁶⁵ Irigaray already prefigures this critique of Nietzsche, thus locating him in "the male imaginary," in *Speculum*. "As things now go, man moves away in order to preserve his stake in the value of his representation, while woman counterbalances with the permanence of a (self)recollection which is unaware of itself as such. And which, in the recurrence of this return upon the self – and its special economy will need to be located – can continue to support the illusion that the object is inert." It should be noted how this comment also prefigures her critique of Nietzsche's notion of the eternal recurrence. Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, translated by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 134.

In Nietzsche's thinking (and in the terms of the zeitgeist that he reflects and that Irigaray seeks to transform) "Woman" continues to function as the other of the same for man – functioning as the space in which man, reinforcing the masculine fantasy of God (and transforming the signs of that fantasy into the terms of commodity fetishization) exteriorizes himself as the vitalizing force of temporality. Even as the constantly dividing division of that space, "woman" can only have value as an absence that reproduces the culturally dominant forms of desire in which her value has been conferred. To rethink the encounter of sexual difference, Irigaray argues, constellates a reimagination of desire with a radical reconsideration of language, space and time.¹⁶⁶ The normal understanding of space, time and the desire that governs their distribution is enshrined "in all theogonies."¹⁶⁷ Always, the founding act of God is the creation of space, which can then be peopled and temporized in a movement in which "God would be time itself, lavishing or exteriorizing itself in its action in space and places."¹⁶⁸ Such a movement is reminiscent of the language of the Hegelian dialectic and the masculine identity of the god-subject who reels in and subdues the external world in the fulfillment of time.

According to Irigaray, this assimilating movement characterizes the Western intellectual and political tradition. The Nietzschean alternative to the assimilating

¹⁶⁶ "The transition to a new age requires a change in our perception and conception of *space-time*, the *inhabiting of places*, and of *containers*, or *envelopes of identity*. It assumes and entails and evolution or a transformation of forms, of the relations of *matter* and *form* and of the interval *between*: the trilogy of the constitution of place. Each age inscribes a limit to this trinitary configuration: *matter, form, interval*, or *power [puissance], act, intermediary-interval*.

Desire occupies the place of the *interval*. Giving it a permanent definition would amount to suppressing it as desire. Desire demands a sense of attraction: a change in the interval, the displacement of the subject or of the object in their relations of nearness or distance.

The transition to a new age comes at the same time as a change in the economy of desire. ..."
Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, translated by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 7-8.

¹⁶⁷ Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 7.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

momentum of the dialectic deflects its assimilating movement, but the thinking of difference that Nietzsche (and an ongoing lineage of neoNietzschean thinking) so forcefully articulates also demands to be troubled. We must rock *its* fantasy of control; we must question the nobility of his psychic economy.

Irigaray begins to challenge this fantasy of a desire that leaves man in control, situated within a particular configuration of space and time, by deflating Nietzsche's loftiest thought, the eternal return. In a move that resonates with Heidegger's interpretation of the function of the eternal return in Nietzsche's thinking, Irigaray obliquely disputes the Deleuzean and Derridean interpretations of the eternal return that underwrite our faith in Nietzsche as a thinker of difference and agonal political engagement.¹⁶⁹ Whereas both Deleuze and Derrida interpret the eternal return as the return of the moment of difference, Irigaray sees it as the return of the same that confirms the autological movement of his thought. Irigaray, in fact, links this return of the same to the maintenance (in perpetuity) of the moment of masculine desire for the feminine other. She calls our attention to how Nietzsche's thought constellates the notion of the eternal return, the circular movement of the sun,¹⁷⁰ and the nuptial ring that Nietzsche brings to "woman."¹⁷¹ As Kelly Mortenson puts it, Irigaray calls into question readings of the will to power as an ongoing process of differentiation by attending to the recurrent imagery of the circle:

¹⁶⁹ Kelly Oliver, *Womanizing Nietzsche*, 106.

¹⁷⁰ "Isn't your sun-worship also a kind of resentment? Don't you measure your ecstasy against the yardstick of envy? And isn't your circle made of the will to live this irradiation – there will be no other but me?" Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 15.

¹⁷¹ In the incantation from "The Seven Seals (Or: The Yes and Amen Song)," Zarathustra sings:
 ... "Oh, how should I not lust after eternity and after the nuptial ring of rings, the ring of recurrence?
 Never yet have I found the woman from whom I wanted children, unless it be this woman whom I love: for I love you, O eternity.
 For I love you, O eternity!" Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 228 ff.

The circle, be it in the form of the sun at noon celebrated by Zarathoustra as the perfect star of illumination, or, in the form of the circle of the serpent around the neck of Zarathoustra's eagle as the symbol of the eternal recurrence of the same, or, finally, in the form of the subject's concentric perspective – signifies for Irigaray Nietzsche's obsession with sameness and consequently a denial of difference.¹⁷²

Or, one might say that Nietzsche's confrontation with a moment of difference – a confrontation that always returns – is an importantly circumscribed confrontation: it always remains within the constructed space and tempo of a masculine staging. Nietzsche remains, Irigaray suggests, a puppet-master, secretly orchestrating the silence of woman on the stage of his thought. When Irigaray turns to the already (already diffracted, it is true) character of Zarathoustra, she notes that the ultimate comfort of his circle is ensured by a certain kind of rhythm, that always pre-frames the "other"

Thus he wishes to receive only what beats in time to the rhythm he sets. And nothing is in store for him at mid-night except what, at his midday, he stored away. And if mid-night be even darker than his day had imagined, that is the way his star still rises to perfect his circle.¹⁷³

Irigaray asks if the monological/solipsistic glory that Nietzsche valorizes doesn't, in fact, partake in the creation of a conceptual system of feeble reassurance. Doesn't his participation in this system, she asks, make him guilty of the very cowardly inability to affirm the play of chance as the dice throw of necessity at which he scoffs? And doesn't it, in the end, reveal a fear of the intersubjective dimension of embodied becoming in

¹⁷² Kelly Mortenson, *The Feminine and Nihilism: Luce Irigaray with Nietzsche and Heidegger* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1994), 59.

¹⁷³ *Marine Lover*, 10.

Nietzsche's thought?¹⁷⁴ For Irigaray, the Nietzschean notion of the eternal return reflects the squeamishness of a thinker, who in his effort to will his own auto-genesis, vomits "up that first nurse whose milk and blood he has drunk."¹⁷⁵ The Nietzschean desire imagined under the temporal and spatial economy of the eternal return can only be sustained by maintaining a quite *éffete* relationship to the gender to which he was born and by which he continues to be borne. In a pivotal line from *Marine Lover*, Irigaray's feminine "I" turns to address "Nietzsche's" "You": "And your whole will, your eternal recurrence, are these anything more than the dream of one who neither wants to have been born, nor to continue being born at every instant, of a female other?"¹⁷⁶ Nietzsche, for all of his valuation of a corporeal becoming within the intramundane, suddenly seems open to the charges of transcendental denial that he levels against the Platonic/Christian tradition of the West:

Eternity, that is the music of one who senses and fears decline. And for passing beyond life and death, see how busily he is at work at this moment. To leave his body behind and fly away unburdened, isn't this always and forever the point of creation?"

Isn't it still a ghost's desire rather than a living being's? And to transmute beyond the body? Without stopping in this life?¹⁷⁷

The desire that circulates in Nietzsche's thought, Irigaray suggests, is a strangely deracinated desire. It is a desire that, in deferring the difficult work of meeting the other

¹⁷⁴ Nietzsche certainly professes the embodied dimension of thinking, but his inattentiveness to the embodied other situates his thinking within the dream of autogenesis. Nietzsche proclaims the task that faces thinkers like himself: "constantly, we have to give birth to our thoughts out of our pain, like mothers, endow them with all we have of blood, heart, fire, pleasure, passion, agony, conscience, fate, and catastrophe." Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 35 – 36.

¹⁷⁵ Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 26.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Later on, "she" says to her interlocutor, "And, as you enter into eternity of your recurrence, you cut yourself off from that unique occasion when you received life." *Marine Lover*, 57.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

on her own ground, avoids facing up to the limits of desire's promised encounter with the embodied, fleshed, sexed other towards which it tends. For all of its value in resuscitating thinking, the intensification of this practice of deferral threatens its own narcosis – one in which a prefabricated notion of “woman” functions as an absence that maintains the coherence of the author's desires. The openness professed towards women, might, in fact, be the last, perhaps unconscious, ruse aimed at preserving a historically specific psychic economy of pleasures. Man knows he must no longer chase after women, but he finds it more difficult to abandon the ritualized, mnemotechnically inscribed patterns of desire in which he has been enculturated and to which he seems programmed to return.

Should woman be pleased with the orbit that man always prescribes for her? The protagonist of *Marine Lover* answers, and in so doing, connects up her prescribed sexual role with her role in the social, cultural economy constructed by man:

And it pleases me not that the hours should repeat themselves and fade one into the other according to the orb of your single sun – that your will should always be at least twice times one, and the same again. So that this way everything happens and happens to be what you are. That, for your eternity, everything should always turn in a circle, and that within that ring I should remain – your booty.¹⁷⁸

Irigaray's diagnosis of the proprietorial desire of Nietzsche's thought, we can now begin to see, not only seeks to enter into a transformative relationship with that thought, it also suggests an incisive materialist feminist critique that delimits the ways in which Nietzsche's thinking might inform Marxist and feminist inspired forms of critical theory. Her troubling of Nietzsche's thinking underscores the connection between this latest ruse

¹⁷⁸ Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 11.

of patriarchal thought – maintaining ownership by denying the possibility of any secure personal ownership – and the lineage of women’s status within capitalist economies. Irigaray suggests, in other words, that women’s oppression in capitalist economies cannot be understood apart from the historical effort to both exclude women from participation in these economies (by both preventing them from participating in public occupations and by ignoring their labor) and to treat them as equivalent objects of exchange that can be traded between men.

Jean-Joseph Goux clarifies this point by situating Irigaray’s work within an idiosyncratic distinction between the postmodern and the ultramodern, locating the timeliness of Irigaray’s work as a form of post-marxist resistance. It is a constitutive conceit, a “sociosymbolic process,” of the ultramodern, Goux argues, to level the hierarchical signifiers (“general equivalents” such as “gold, father, phallus, speech”) in favor of a “radical hegemony of the function of exchange.” This “regime of generalized equivalence” naturalizes the process of capitalist exchange in ways that cover over the material differences that are sustained by the systematic machinations of capital. In late capitalism (what Goux has called the ultramodern), a niched, demographed economy of affect offers the illusion of individuality in a world that simultaneously reduces all of its members to increasingly equivalent, and thus interchangeable, bits of information. Thus Irigaray’s thinking here draws strangely proximate to thinkers like Donna Haraway, who challenge us to engage in the risk of a “radical nominalism,” a pragmatic-ironic naming of names¹⁷⁹ so that the encounter of difference might become the critical political event

¹⁷⁹ Naming, for Haraway, is an invitation, an ongoing, tentative act of necessity that gives us the leverage that we need to survive in the world (in chapter two, we have tried to demonstrate how this logic of naming is fundamental to Nietzsche’s thinking, and how it’s essentially open-ended character typifies the thinking of postNietzscheans such as Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida. In chapter three, we will extend this lineage

that occurs between forces that give themselves names. Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference thus militates against the dehumanizing, alienating logic of "neutrality" that helps propel the continuous movement of capital.¹⁸⁰ The encounter between real people with real differences, between men and women, appears as a horizon within the logic of capitalism that might lead economizing man (and the women colonized by his thought) to imagine a different way of comportment towards others, breaking up our increasing tendency to see others as objects to be manipulated for profit.

Irigaray's work not only troubles the seam that both separates and connects her thought to Nietzsche's. In doing so, it also marks out the seams between Nietzschean forms of social critique and the Marxist and feminist interventions with which it is so often wedded. On the one hand, Irigaray calls our attention to how the transformation of a phallogocentric world is connected to a critique of the ways in which man's social, psychological, and material control of women is sustained by contemporary forms of commodity capitalism. At the same time, however, Irigaray helps us to understand how a

of Nietzschean thinking, tracing its trajectory through the feminist perspectives of Judith Butler, Haraway, and, surprisingly, Nancy Hartsock). Haraway, for example, in categorizing "three twentieth-century configurations of bioscientific thinking about the categories of unity and difference that constitute the human species" finds herself "nervously" working "with a chart, a crude taxonomic device" that allows her "to keep" her "columns neatly divided and" her "rows suggestively linked." She suggests that we make her taxonomic "chart into a narrative device, that is, to use it to construct a story." She stresses that this does not mean that such stories are merely imaginary: "Rather, narratives are devices to produce certain kinds of meaning. I [Haraway] try to use stories to tell what I think is the truth – a located, embodied, contingent, and therefore real truth." Dona Haraway, *Modest Witness@Second Millenium. Female Man Meets OncoMouse* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 218, 230. I call this logic *pragmatic-ironic* because of its similarities to Richard Rorty's description of a pragmatic irony. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Irigaray seems more willing to think in an "essentialist" register than these thinkers, but she does so in a way that always raises the question of difference, and which might, therefore, open up her own essentialism to differences that it cannot, in the historical specificity to which it sees itself responding, account for. Thus, woman, which for Irigaray is simultaneously a matter of biological and historical reality, might promote an ethical encounter with other others, those who are different from our immediate perspective in terms of their race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

¹⁸⁰ Jean-Joseph Goux, "Irigaray vs. the Utopia of the Neutral Sex," trans. by Margaret Whitford, in *Engaging With Irigaray*, ed. by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 187 – 89.

dominant notion of heterosexual desire helps to naturalize capitalist forms of economic activity. Her insistence on recognizing “sexual difference” marks an ongoing refusal of the deracinated identities imposed upon us by the historically interpenetrating logics of phallogocentrism and of capitalism. As we will see, Irigaray’s thinking moves beyond Nietzsche’s imagination of specific, corporeal identities that craft and are crafted in ways that always open towards an ongoing process of becoming. Irigaray’s signal accomplishment in the deterritorializing, “ironic-mimetic,” movement of her thinking is to situate Nietzsche’s valuation of embodied becoming in a suddenly and unavoidably intersubjective context.

II. I Hear You, Can You Hear Me?

Marine Lover tells the story of a protagonist, an “I,” who wants to bring to the attention of her love a blindspot in his experience of the world (even in his love for her) – the positing of “woman” as an absence. Rather than polemically rebuke him, she implicates herself with him in a certain kind of commitment, and, in taking this dramatic role, she encodes the stakes and the location of an exemplary kind of writing. Such a rethinking of writing, and a general rethinking of the language that “subjectifies” us, is absolutely necessary to Irigaray’s necessary defense of the “impossible.”¹⁸¹ Irigaray

¹⁸¹ In commenting on her exemplary encounter with Renzo Imbeni, the Communist Mayor of Bologna, Irigaray constructively meditates on the “noble fiction” that both underwrites and, in its dual threats of functioning as a politically disabling ideology (acceptable for the masses) or as a formula for a mere utopianism (satisfying the fatuous theorist), delimits the efficacy of a certain kind of critical political theory. After signaling her allegiance to what she has read of his political activity and its commitment to, amongst other things, democratic control of the city by its inhabitants and “a respect for the cultural inheritance of feminism,” Irigaray plays with the idea of the “reality” that divides them: “He deals with the already possible; I defend the impossible.” She recognizes that, as a writer, it is difficult to consolidate her contributions to the political arena, and that her kind of intellectual work is typically consigned to the realm of the “impossible” by the society in which it operates. Nonetheless, Irigaray affirms the necessity of the “impossible” in the realm of any possible politics that desires to transform the world. Irigaray identifies herself as “a political militant for the impossible, which is not to say a utopian. Rather, I want what is yet to be as the only possibility of a future.” As such, her “impossible” and Imbeni’s “possible” are linked, since he needs the horizon of the impossible that orients the politics that he pursues within the realm of the

takes up the question of Nietzsche's blindness to the realities of their partnership in a way that thematizes the ethics of one's intervention in and encounter with that which is other to its own discursive formation. She enacts a critical intervention into Nietzsche's thinking via the amorous sentiment that circulates between their thought; by extension, we might say that she takes her desire for "Nietzsche," for his thinking, as an opportunity to thematize,¹⁸² by enacting, "an ethics of the passions."¹⁸³

Irigaray understands an emerging kinship between her thought and Nietzsche's, but she sees the limitations of Nietzsche's own articulations, and how they mark off some of the limits that form the site of their relationship. Her gift (the knowledge of these limits), however, is difficult to give, and difficult to receive. It works in a way that calls into question her lover's passion, his own solipsistically imagined ideas about what their love should be, and the practices by which he modulates, for his pleasure and need, their distance. She wants to give voice to a different way in which their difference, articulated as a problematic, might then "constitute the horizon of worlds more fecund than any know to date ..."¹⁸⁴ Irigaray's mimetic ironization of Nietzschean thought seeks to sustain its differentiating force, but it insists on remembering the embodied difference, the culturally specific (and thus politically relevant) sexual difference that qualifies the possible ways in which men and women might speak to one another.

possible. Irigaray notes, "When I hear of what he is achieving, it seems to me he is shifting the boundaries between the possible and the impossible. Isn't this now our only chance?" Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, 9–10.

¹⁸² Exemplary relationships that suggest the intersubjective ideal that Irigaray seeks to articulate do not rely on conventional notions of an immediate relationship: "...it can be mediated in various ways. It can be in a relation (whether of intention, assistance, or dependence) with a woman or a man who is not present., who never has been or never will be present. I can be determined by a man or a woman who is no longer here, by the historical relevance of what he or she says, or by the *oeuvre*, for example." *I Love to You*, 126–127.

¹⁸³ Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 12.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 5.

Irigaray's staged encounter with Nietzsche resonates with her larger effort to report and critique the recurring roles that "woman" has played in the dominant discourses and structures of power in western experience. As "other," woman has functioned within masculine self-understandings as the ground of "the economy – or economy – of sameness."¹⁸⁵ At times, Irigaray argues that there is no space for woman's speech; she is systematically excluded from the language in which she finds herself immersed. At one level, Irigaray poses the problem of language as an instructive hyperbole, raising the philosophical question of how, if woman's voice is by definition systematically excluded from the language and the modes of thought of the western intellectual, phallogocentric tradition, how can women go about creating/speaking in their proper voice when the only language available to them is the language of man? For Irigaray, the claim of the totalizing power of language is warranted by the profound degree to which language and thinking are in fact saturated with an identifiably masculine perspective. In some of her linguistic work, Irigaray, along these lines, has tried to show that the near totalizing predominance of masculine speech is a statistically verifiable phenomenon.¹⁸⁶

Of course, if the feminine is *never* possible within the speech and thought of the West, and if that thought increasingly structures even the non-Western world, then the effort to radically transform that thought would be mired in a performative contradiction. Yet, Irigaray finds hope in looking again, listening anew, venturing finally to touch the seemingly totalized field of western thought. Within the intellectual representatives of a western, masculine perspective that reaches into every facet of modern human life,

¹⁸⁵ Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 77.

¹⁸⁶ See, for example, Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*, translated by Alison Martin (New York: Routledge, 1996), 69 – 95.

Irigaray is able to ferret out unrecognized possibilities, silences, and exclusions that hint at the possibility of an entirely other way of seeing (hearing, feeling) the world. Even within the all-encompassing embrace of the phallogocentric western intellectual tradition there are gaps that sustain these kinds of productive possibilities: the protagonist of *Marine Lover*, for example, suggests, a counter-voice that has remained silently but insistently at work within that tradition. There is even the hint that woman has always already been political in her silence, that her's has been a strategic and ethical response to the origins of masculine dominance. Polemical man could never hear it straight up; he had to work toward that point (Nietzsche's encounter with "woman" in his thinking must certainly be counted as working toward this point), drawn by a silence inherent in language and thus thought, where he would, in his seeking, finally have to address the intersubjective implications of the other of our thought. "And you had all to lose sight of me so I could come back, toward you, with an other gaze."¹⁸⁷ "But had I never held back, never would you have remembered that something exists which has a language other than your own."¹⁸⁸ To polemicize, to have fought back in the way that man always expects, would be to capitulate in advance to the masculine economy of encounter that Irigaray seeks to transform. If Nietzsche's thinking has brought masculine thought to this end, to this limit within its own thinking, to the moment of radical alterity that has initiated its overcoming, then it seems worth suggesting that even within Western thought's masculine, autological progression, the dawning of a certain form of intersubjective comportment has always been inevitable; the feminine has always remained excessive to the mirroring function to which man has tried to limit it.

¹⁸⁷ Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 3.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

Part of Irigaray's effort, then, to recover the "true" voice of the feminine other has been by challenging and disrupting philosophical discourse, because it is that discourse "that sets forth the law for all others," functioning as "the discourse on discourse."¹⁸⁹ Given the assimilative power of that discourse, however, that monotonously reduces "*all others to the economy of the same*,"¹⁹⁰ the question arises as to how one might disrupt such a system without being drawn back into, assimilated by, that system: "For how can we introduce ourselves into such a tightly-woven systematicity?"¹⁹¹ As any alternative language (such as the language of the feminine other) begins to articulate itself, it will do so in relationship to the only languages available (phallographic discourse), the language of the status quo that systematically excludes the subjective rights of its "other."¹⁹²

Irigaray responds to this seemingly impossible challenge through, at least initially, techniques of "ironic mimesis." These techniques reflect another dimension of Irigaray's kinship with Nietzsche, who, as we have seen, writes in ways that enacts or performs an overcoming of the language and the conceptual framework in which he is invested. Nietzsche writes in ways that inhabit certain patterns and lineages of coherence and which, in the spirit of active engagement, open those patterns and lineages to a reconceptualization that cannot be imagined in the terms available to Nietzsche's own discourse. Irigaray follows a similar strategy in attempting to open up the masculine

¹⁸⁹ Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse," from the *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 74.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 76.

¹⁹² In some ways, Irigaray's work in this regard picks up the thread of Audre Lorde's famous insight that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." Finding these new tools in a woman's standpoint doesn't, in and of itself, exactly do the trick. That category all too clearly runs the risk of ontologizing the roles that certain women occupy, granting a particular form of experience a governing power within feminist discourse. A standpoint, in any case, is only one perspective onto the temporal experience of identity. As we will touch on in the next chapter, Adorno's appropriation of Nietzsche thematizes the interrelated problematics of totality and difference within the thinking of a post-holocaust Marxism. In a similar fashion, Irigaray's rendezvous with Nietzsche will thematize the questions of totality and difference in relationship to critical feminist thought.

discourse that her writing necessarily inhabits through a mimetic twisting of that discourse. In particular, for our interests here, she follows this strategy of mimetic irony by writing with Nietzsche, within the problematic of encounter that he has inaugurated, in ways that stress the optional status of Nietzsche's own psychic economy of encounter.

Both Nietzsche and Irigaray seek to transform the language that we in-habit, creating a new form of subjectivity by reimagining the language that constitutes that subjectivity. For Irigaray, this "inhabiting" is not only a marker of the environment that we find ourselves occupying, it is a central characteristic of masculine activity. She asserts "To inhabit is the fundamental trait of man's being," and "... man is forever searching for, building, creating homes for himself every where: Caves, huts, women, cities, language, concepts, theory, and so on."¹⁹³ We might say, therefore, that the activity of inhabiting is fundamental to the reproduction of the habitats that we occupy, and that the transformation of the masculine political and social world that we occupy necessarily entails refashioning the process of *in-habiting*.

Irigaray has spoken explicitly about the general strategy of ironic mimesis as a necessary move for women interested in transforming the masculine forms of thought and action that have characterized the western intellectual and political traditions. "There is an initial phase, perhaps only one 'path,' the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of mimicry. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means to already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it."¹⁹⁴ One must follow the lines of phallogocentric language, alert to tactical opportunities where one can ironize the effects of that language. "To play with mimesis

¹⁹³ Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 141.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 76. See also *Speculum*, 142.

is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it.” Such play uncovers that which remains hidden by masculine discourse, the “possible operation of the feminine in language.”¹⁹⁵ This “reopening,” in other words, would “pry out of” philosophical discourses “what they have borrowed that is feminine, from the feminine, to make” those discourses “‘render up’ and give back what they owe the feminine.”¹⁹⁶

Irigaray’s talk of “the feminine,” her insistence on the fact of sexual difference, and the explicit political recommendations that she has made for women based on difference would seem to suggest that Irigaray proffers an essentialist view of “woman.” She insists, for example, “Women’s liberation, and indeed the liberation of humanity, depends upon the definition of a female generic, that is, a definition of what woman is, not just this or that woman.”¹⁹⁷ We should hesitate, however, before simply labeling Irigaray an essentialist. Her claims about the natural difference that inheres between men and women arises within, and seeks to continue, a thinking that gives play to the differences that arise between forces in different contexts. Whereas some strains of Nietzsche’s legacy have privileged difference to the point of challenging the very notion of identity, Irigaray posits an insuperable feminine identity as the necessary prerequisite for cultivating an admirable intersubjective relationship between individuals that both promotes communicative projects and sustains the difference that distinguishes communicative partners. For a language of difference to become possible, Irigaray argues, we must fully thematize the question of sexual difference by granting it an

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 76.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 74.

¹⁹⁷ Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*, translated by Alison Martin (New York: Routledge, 1996), 65.

epochal status.¹⁹⁸ The erasure of the question of sexual difference reinforces a general tendency of modernity that impoverishes difference in general in its drive to reduce individuals to equivalents whose labor can be exchanged through markets or rearranged within bureaucratic structures. The increasing dominance of this form of reason, which Irigaray (like Adorno) equates with a masculine world-view, colonizes language and thought, creating a seamless web that tends to occlude alternative ways of inhabiting the world. It is therefore quite plausible to understand Irigaray's insistence on an identifiable woman's voice as a pragmatic appeal that recognizes the realities of politics within a still patriarchally controlled political economy. It is along these lines that Tamsin Lorraine reads "her sloganistic suggestions as practical interventions that are meant for the specific historical situation in which we find ourselves rather than universal notions about sexual difference that are transhistorical."¹⁹⁹ Her sloganeering is a germane response to the political exigencies of the time.

In fact, Irigaray suggests that an adequate response to the well-entrenched habits of masculine being that continue to govern both men and women requires a multidimensional political response. On the one hand, there is a need for legal interventions that would begin "to alter our customs and norms."²⁰⁰ Here and now, against the backdrop of a still phallographic society, there is a necessity for expressing a natural sexual difference in "what has to be asserted *now* as women's rights" (my

¹⁹⁸ Irigaray, *The Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 5.

¹⁹⁹ Tamsin Lorraine, 93. Irigaray herself notes that she seeks to articulate "a new stage in my existence, one enabling me to accomplish my gender in a specific identity, related to my history and my period in History. For the generic universal is not transhistorical." *I Love to You*, 112.

²⁰⁰ Irigaray, *I Love to You*, 133. See also, *Thinking the Difference*, translated by Karin Montin (New York: Routledge, 1994), vii – 87, and *Sexes and Genealogies*, translated by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 1 – 5.

emphasis).²⁰¹ These women's rights include a women's right to human dignity, which would entail preventing "the commercial use of their bodies and images" and "the exploitation of motherhood ... by civil and religious powers"; a women's right to human identity, including "the legal encodification of virginity" and "the right to motherhood"; the right to protect themselves and their children from the dictates of male law, such as war and pollution; financial protections; a revamping of systems of linguistic and financial exchange that would ensure "a right to equivalent exchange for men and women"; and finally, the assurance that "Women shall be represented in equal numbers in all civil and religious decision making bodies, given that religion also represents civil authority."²⁰²

On the other hand, while Irigaray recognizes that juridical transformations are necessarily part of any effort to transform the still patriarchal world that we inhabit, she also insists that extra-judicial work is necessary to create the kinds of people capable of envisioning, crafting and implementing these laws.²⁰³ We must "intervene in the evolution of culture" through exemplary kinds of behavior, such as changing "our way of speaking and communicating," and in doing so, transforming "our way of loving."²⁰⁴

Transforming communication and the possibilities for love that are embedded in its grammatical structures, however, is only possible if we recover the difference between men and women that has remained elusive within the contours of masculine ways of seeing the world. As things stand, "What we know of humanity still relates to its needs

²⁰¹ Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, 86.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 86 – 89.

²⁰³ Irigaray is thus ensconced in a form of a paradox that troubles all normative-critical forms of critical theory. See page 204 above in chapter 5 for how this paradox appears in "Rousseau's paradox of founding."

²⁰⁴ Irigaray, *I Love to You*, 133.

...”, is still situated in a means-ends economy that impoverishes our ability to know of “anything beyond needs.”²⁰⁵ The language that has evolved within this economy of needs enables “the mastery of the *direction* of the will and thought by the subject, historically man.”²⁰⁶ According to Irigaray, the language that we use reproduces this historically male subject as an solipsistic, autological being capable of seeing to his needs, but still unable to actually communicate. Within this language, even when it is given dialectical form by Hegel, or when, with thinkers like Nietzsche and Levinas, it introduces the notion of radical alterity, it is impossible, according to Irigaray, for the real other of the feminine gender to be heard. Without the insistence on the difference between men and women, “... if the other is not defined in his or her actual reality, there is only an other me, not real others.”²⁰⁷

Thus, learning to communicate differently, and thus love differently, requires an attentiveness to how we might begin to hear one another in our difference. If we are to cultivate the different way of hearing, however, from within the language that we already occupy, with which we are always already contiguous, Irigaray suggests, we must learn to use this fact of contiguity to our advantage. Rather, however, than imagine this touching as inevitably bound up with teleologies of fusion, control and presence, we can begin to imagine this touching – with language, with the philosophers that we read, with the real others that we encounter – as a moment that marks both our relationship to that which we encounter and our separation from it.

Thus when the “I” of the masculine subject encounters the feminine “you,” he finds, in a thinking that now begins to hesitate before its own will to mastery, the

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 42.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 45.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 61.

feminine other that has always really eluded his grasp. Language, even in being tailored to fulfilling a masculine pursuit of needs, has been unable to do without (and thus totally suppress) the language of woman. In her language, “‘she’ sets off in all directions leaving ‘him’ unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. Hers are contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand.”²⁰⁸ So “woman,” to the degree that she has served as the mirroring object of western phallogocentric discourses, has also remained beyond the ken of the masculine thinkers who would control her.

When Irigaray takes up the cause of a practical politics, even as she demands rights for a feminine generic, she does not have to do so in terms of unified, monistic sense of what woman is for “woman” is not, in any final or ontological sense, a subject herself. At least not the subject as it is understood in the terms of phallogocentric philosophical discourses. She is always different unto herself, always in the process of becoming other. Irigaray playfully lets us see her, but in order to imagine a form of subjectivity that is not premised on erection, rigidity, unity and presence – the phallus. Women’s anatomy, Irigaray asks us to imagine, already presents a different way of thinking about the self, unseating our tendency to think about ourselves in static, unitary terms.

For in what she says, too, at least when she dares, woman is constantly touching herself. She steps ever so slightly aside from herself with a murmur, an exclamation, a whisper, a sentence left unfinished ... when she returns, it is to set off again from elsewhere. ... One would have to listen with another ear, as if hearing *an ‘other meaning’ always in the process of weaving itself, of embracing itself with words, but also of getting rid of words in order to not to become*

²⁰⁸ Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 29.

fixed, congealed in them. For if ‘she’ says something, it is not, it is already no longer identical with what it means. What she says is never identical with any thing, moreover; rather it is contiguous. *It touches (upon).*²⁰⁹

In the above image, what seems to begin as an internal touching, always maintaining a contiguity but, in doing so, always differentiating itself, is suddenly transferred into voice, into a way of communicating itself to the other of the world. The description of this internal touching, which continually differentiates the feminine subject (and thus is always disaggregating the essence of woman that it represents), is thus already the basis for an alternative logic of encounter. Relationships between the feminist subject and the masculine other can now be refigured as an ideal of intersubjective practice that complicates the consumptive power of love. A mode of touching, valorized by Irigaray, might enter into our communicative practices:

This *touching upon* does not take place without a syntax constituting or bringing about the relation with the other. It is a grammar which prefers the question to the imperative; it chooses predicates manifesting an intentionality compatible with that of the other; it privileges verbs expressing dialogue, doing together; it uses *to, between, with, together*, rather than transitive forms, which always risk reducing the other to an object.²¹⁰

That relationship between a feminine “I” and a masculine “you” produces the moment of difference that characterizes the unique notion of identity that now emerges from Irigaray’s thought. The “other,” as a “Concrete, irreducible, exteriority comes to me from the other gender, in relation to which my interiority constitutes itself in

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Irigaray, *I Love to You*, 125.

difference.”²¹¹ By insisting on the primacy of sexual difference, Irigaray initiates a necessarily intersubjective accounting of the self that unseats any unitary or autological self-understanding. This intersubjective accounting, however, does not efface the desire for transcending one’s present circumstances. Rather, it situates this desire for transcendence, this process of becoming other, on a horizontal plane, in which the self is always becoming other than it is now in the encounter between “two universals,” man and woman, neither of which, therefore, can think of themselves as the whole.²¹²

For Irigaray, therefore, there emerges, in attentiveness to the language of love and desire that permeates our thinking, the possibility of saying “I Love You” differently.²¹³ “I love you,” as we have been able to utter it, has always risked reducing “the other to the object of my love.”²¹⁴ “I desire you” only threatens this reduction more sharply. But if we begin to think and act love and desire in the intersubjective register cultivated by Irigaray’s insistence on intersubjective difference, something begins to happen. The whole edifice begins to tremble as “Love” fulfills its latent promise, not to extirpate desire, but to redeem “the flesh through the transfiguration of desire *for* the other (as an object?) into desire *with* the other.”²¹⁵ Rather than the ultimately destructive formulation and enactment of desire – as a building tension demanding discharge in order to achieve a renewed homeostasis²¹⁶ – desire now becomes the site of an ongoing affirmation that arises between partners. Desire is affirmed as a creative and communicative project directed toward our becoming as limited, mortal, corporeal beings that always already

²¹¹ Ibid., 145.

²¹² Ibid., 106.

²¹³ Ibid., 129.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 138.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 139.

²¹⁶ Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 75 – 76, fn 1. Irigaray here notes the similarity between this Freudian formulation and René Girard’s demonstration of “how each social era is reconstructed on the basis of a sacrifice, of some cathartic immolation that is essential to the return of the relational order.”

depend upon the other – the necessarily sexed other – to flourish and survive. No longer merely a mechanism to ensure the proprietorial rights of a patriarchal society or the reproduction of a masculine capitalist economy, love is again evoked; not in order to capture, to experience an “autistic, egological, solitary love,” but rather to produce the potential of a “shared outpouring.” In such a relation, “we are at least three, each of which is irreducible to any of the others: you, me, and our work ...”²¹⁷

²¹⁷ Luce Irigaray, “Questions to Emmanuel Levinas,” in *The Irigaray Reader*, 180 – 81. This notion of intersubjective comportment, premised on a notion of community that sustains difference “Would entail, beyond the enslavement to property, beyond the subject’s submission to the object (which does not mean to objectivity), becoming capable of giving and receiving, of being active and passive, of having an intention that stays attuned to interactions, that is, of seeking a new economy of existence of being which is neither that of mastery nor that of slavery but rather of exchange with no preconstituted object – vital exchange, cultural exchange, of words, gestures, etc., an exchange that thus able to *communicate* at times, to commune (but I’ll leave aside for the moment this complex mode of communication in which every illusion is possible), beyond any exchange of objects. What we would be dealing with, then, is the establishment of another era of civilization, or of culture, in which exchange of objects, and most particularly of women, would no longer form the basis for the constitution of the cultural order.” *I Love to You*, 45.

Chapter 4: If I Were a Carpenter: “Critical Desire” and the Problem of Post-Identitarian Construction

I. Ooloi²¹⁸

Following its twin, often contradictory aims of combatting material impoverishment and of opening up, at all levels of political engagement, the creation of “democratic space,” this interrogation stages a particular understanding of contemporary critical theory that draws on the resources of both more traditional Marxisms and a Nietzschean-inspired poststructuralism. This flavor of critical theory is marked by an insistence on thinking through the challenges to Marxism posed by Nietzschean and post-Nietzschean thought as a way of sustaining the problematic of freedom within the quest for economic justice. Such a critical theory, whose lineage can be traced back to at least Adorno, recognizes in Nietzschean insights resources for demystifying the reified ideology of capitalist philosophy, culture and science, and for beginning to craft an affirmative post-holocaust political ethos.

That being said, the proper subject of this chapter is feminism, for it is at the site of a certain kind of feminism that these two strands of thinking can be given a specific, pragmatic application. At the site where the problematic of sexual difference, and its occlusions, is thematized, critical theory interrupts that stubborn, necessary habit of

²¹⁸ Stage Directions: In Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* series, the Ooloi is a third gender of the Oankali species (who have arrived on the earth soon after the human race has (nearly) destroyed itself in nuclear war). The Oankali reproduce as gene traders, “their own origins lost to them through an infinitely long series of mergings and exchanges reaching deep into time and space.” Donna Haraway, “Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 227. Haraway discusses Butler’s work in some detail in order to diffract the ways in which official discourses on immunology fashion and cover over the multiplicity of postmodern selves. In the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, the Oankali save a group of remaining humans by merging with them; this salvation is not, therefore, the return to some pristine vision of the same; nor is it without coercion. Rather, Butler’s series of novels narrates the “irretrievable loss of the illusion of the one” (228). The ooloi is “a neuter being who uses its special appendages to mediate and engineer the gene trading of the species and of each family” (229). A cross-pollinator, one might say, rather than a synthesizer.

theory finding its coherence through forgotten processes of exclusion. If the “feminine” has served as the other of the same that silently underwrites the coherence of patriarchy, capitalism, and their underpinnings in the western philosophical tradition, and if this logic has remained at work, relatively unexamined, in Marx and Nietzsche’s liberatory projects, then feminism marks a particular limit for critical theory working within Marxian and Nietzschean lineages. In uncovering the function of the “feminine” within our traditional economies of meaning (within, for example, patriarchy, capitalism, western philosophy, Marxism, and Nietzschean inspired thought) and in insisting on the efforts of woman and women to speak autonomously (even when the very languages in which it is possible to speak give no voice and have no space for the feminine subject), feminism sustains the doubled status of a limit. It both marks, across different regimes of power, a boundary that gives these regimes their coherence and opens within them certain horizons of possibility.

We might say, in a language that resonates throughout this dissertation, that feminism interrupts and, in doing so, produces “the” desire of critical theory. The “the” is in quotes, because the desire that is articulated by the limit of feminism (that traverses the field of critical theory) is multiplicitous, and in its very expression asks us to rethink our assumptions about the monistic force of desire.

Furthermore, in describing feminism as a limit that crosses desire, I am continuing to use the leverage of my productive confusion about my desires for both the “feminine” and “feminism.” These two “others,” of course, are not reducible to one another, and you can imagine different women who consider themselves as feminists being rightfully offended by such a claim. As I began to think through the problematic of desire in

relation to feminist and critical theory, however, I have tried to pay some attention to how I am/was situated, “subjectified,” by my desires. Of course, even my subjective experience of these two desires is in no way precisely the same. I have been repeatedly reminded, however, that for most males who understand themselves in terms of heterosexual desire, the question of their relationship to feminism (be it “for” or “against”) entails questions about how they should comport themselves towards the women whom they desire. The conflation of the feminine and feminist, then, begins in an “honest confusion,” but the heuristic value of this conflation is not negligible. If nothing else, both the feminine and the feminist signify a region of identity and concern that are, in important ways, incommensurable with the masculine perspective from which I have begun to think through my relationship to these different identities and to imagine the breadth of a coherent form of critical theory. Those whom I desire interrupt my desire (for the “other’s” body, for her mind, for a finalized critical theory); they remain stubbornly resistant to an impatience for assimilation. In doing so, they act as sites of encounter that transform my experience of that desire. Tracking the movement of this experience of interruption, I want to suggest, gives rise to ways of reimagining the desire that underwrites our motivations across a broad range of scientific, ethical, and political endeavors.

This dissertation confronts and seeks to transform, by joining with a conversation well in progress, an epoch organizing notion of desire, attending to its different manifestations across different levels of political engagement. Given that this contested desire is inextricably bound up with a heterosexual normativity, it might be allowed that attending to the feminine/feminist limit is particularly instructive for a critical theory

(which itself is produced within the ambit of this epoch defining desire) that takes as one of its primary tasks an ongoing critique of its own desire for a better world. In interrupting the teleological and consumptive logic of the unthematized notion of desire that informs a more specific desire for social justice, that limit crosses and problematizes the very notion of utopia; we might follow Foucault in saying that this feminine/feminist limit assumes a heterotopian function that problematizes the space of our utopian vision. We find that it is diffracting that vision, Donna Haraway might say. As someone who critically theorizes from a masculine, heterosexual perspective, this limit always interrupts my desire for a total theory.

Of course, the feminine/feminist limit is but one (however profoundly important) of the limits that traverse and complicate the “we” of critical theory. This “we” around which we organize our politics is also internally differentiated by the limits of race, sexual orientation, class, nationality, environmental concern, etc. – identities and structures of practice and meaning that cannot be merely wished away by our post-identitarian postures or our wishes for a unitary revolutionary class. We might hope, however, that our encounter with the limit of sexual difference, in its specificity, might have an exemplary value for how we comport ourselves towards these other limits. An attentiveness to this heterotopian limit can give rise to an orientation towards a variety of limits that we encounter by bringing home to us, in its stubborn refusal of assimilation, the limits of our mastery. Thus, though critical desire begins within a predominantly heterosexual milieu, and though it is narrated here from a masculine perspective, it proceeds through encounters with various “others” to open up that desire to include possibilities beyond its present heterosexual vocabulary. Such an orientation promotes an

ethos, or at least a particular modality, that could inform efforts to articulate the ongoing openness of critical theory.

One can make the case *from a synoptic perspective* that all three of these sources – Marx, Nietzsche, and feminism – are essential to contemporary critical theory (in some sense that’s being posited here), but it is equally important to stress the necessity of an immanent movement experienced by a particular author/character, the how and why of his finding these different thinkings constellated together. The encounter of these thinkings that he stages here mime the ethos of encounter with which we would articulate our vision of critical theory and which we carry into the world. Here, I write in order to recast my own encounters into a virtual space, but hopefully this narrative of an experience will have an heuristic value for others – both men and women – who suddenly find themselves in a world in which the language that has long nourished their understandings of that world and their relationships with others is no longer capable of accurately describing or admirably engaging with that world. The particular encounter staged here, it is hoped, might orient our effort to think the “totality” of our politics: when I am pressed to construct a politics, to theorize the sweep of a critical orientation towards the political, I recognize that the demands of those who have been systematically oppressed and who seek redress in the articulation of our political imaginations are made by agents inhabiting worlds that are, in varying degrees of subtlety, foreign to my own experience.

II. “The Impossible Heritage”²¹⁹

We will eventually examine how different elements of Marxist and Nietzschean thinking have been brought into productive tension within certain provinces of feminist political thought. We are drawn to how some feminist thinkers – such as Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, and the later incarnations of Nancy Hartsock – pragmatically appropriate insights from both of these lineages in order to develop the conceptual resources necessary to articulate their own political visions. Nietzschean-styled accounts of how desire functions in the constitution and the problematization of identity are productively iterated in the work of these feminists, who therefore continue to augment the vocabularies of transformative desire that are at our disposal.

But what, precisely, is this Marxist/Nietzschean lineage in which this strand of contemporary feminist critical theory find itself working? Can that phrase, “Marxist/Nietzschean lineage,” even make sense? How is their encounter articulated before it reaches the shores of its feminine/feminist limits?

One couldn’t hope to fully justify or contest the articulation of that lineage in the intellectual history of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries in the scant space of this essay. We can, however, selectively draw on some of this history in contextualizing the theoretical stakes involved for feminist and critical theory’s ongoing engagements with Nietzsche and Marx. Certainly, Marx and Nietzsche’s influence continues to be felt; it is undeniable that what Weber claimed in 1920, that the “world in which we live as intellectual beings is largely a world bearing the imprint of Marx and Nietzsche,” is iterated across a broad range of contemporary social and political philosophy, including,

²¹⁹ Habermas uses this phrase in describing Bataille’s Nietzschean inspired critique of ideology, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 211.

of course, feminist theory. There is great disagreement, however, about the exact nature of this imprint. There are, initially, profound disagreements about how to interpret the legacy of either thinker taken singly. Marx is, variously, the architect of totalitarian madness, a radical democrat, an existentialist, a Christian, a Jew, a materialist, an idealist, an environmentalist, a scientist, a revolutionary, proto-feminist, misogynist, anti-semite, etc. Nietzsche, likewise, is, in different incarnations, a proto-fascist, anti-semite, misogynist, anti-democrat, anti-socialist, anti-christ, madman, closet metaphysician, psychologist, philologist, philosopher, conservative, bourgeoisie, aristocrat, crypto-democrat, -socialist, -feminist, anti-anti-semite, enemy of German nationalism, proto-postmodern, etc. We have, in fact, spent a good deal of time in chapter two establishing and celebrating the inevitable multiplicity of Nietzsche as the foreground of *our* “Nietzsche.”

When we try to draw the precise relationship between the already moving figures of “Marx” and “Nietzsche,” however, the task becomes even more complicated. On the one hand, the enmity of their thought seems fairly obvious. Nietzsche’s numerous broadsides against socialism – “the logical conclusion of the *tyranny* of the least and the dumbest”²²⁰ – suggests that from the first that this relationship is merely polemical. For Nietzsche, socialism, like democracy, feminism, and Christian morality, merely validates a logic of totalizing mediocrity – a smoothing over of difference – that criminalizes the possibility of the brilliant individual. It might be said, in fact, that the relationship between Nietzsche and Marx always seems to be governed by questions of totality and

²²⁰ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 125 (1885), 77.

difference.²²¹ For Marxist thought, the possibility of social transformation depends upon an ability to see the systemic, total effects of capitalist exchange and upon the possibility of a political solidarity capable of effectively harnessing political power. Nietzschean thought, by contrast, coheres around the partiality of any perspective and the disruption of identity that this partiality implies. Within contemporary critical theory, questions of proper perspective, epistemic warrant, and the terms and possibilities of efficacious political action are sustained as questions by a certain Marx's and a certain Nietzsche's differing commitments to totality and difference.

Because we have been attracted to the possibilities that a Nietzschean thinking of difference offers to leftist thinking, we need, if only to honor that thinking, to hesitate again before what is troubling about privileging difference in a simplistic fashion. That is, we need to draw the limit of a particular "Marx" across a particular utilization of "Nietzsche"²²² within the critical theory that is beginning to emerge in this narrative. For some Marxist critics of Nietzschean thought, the Nietzschean thinking of difference always risks devolving into either a valorization of the atomistic individual fashioning meaning for himself against the backdrop of capitalism, thus always participating in the

²²¹ For a fuller exposition of this problematic as a fundamental point of contestation in the history of 20th Century Western Marxism, see Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). For a different perspective on Marx and Nietzsche's relationship to the notion of totality, see Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1986.

²²² Always, the questions of reading and writing, of appropriation and what is proper, of interpretation and use Nietzsche, Derrida writes, "has perhaps been alone in putting his name – his *names* – and his biographies on the line, running thus most of the risks this entails: for 'him,' for 'them,' for his lives, his names and their future, and particularly for the political future of what he left to be signed." Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. by Christie V. McDonald, Trans. by Peggy Kamuf and Avital Ronnell (New York: Schocken Books, 1982).

reproduction of capitalism as a total system, or, worse, a preparation for the irrational appeals of a demagogic superman.

Lukács's hostility toward Nietzschean thinking, for example, reflects a suspicion about Nietzsche's ability to distance himself from the structuring effects of capital and thus of his ability to recognize the totality that structures his thinking of difference. He diagnosed the essentially bourgeois nature of Nietzsche's philosophy as a function of its illusory denial of totality. Yoking Nietzsche together with Spengler, Lukács argues for the superiority of dialectics to approaches that "relativise the truth about an individual or a species in an ultimately static world (masked though that stasis may be by an illusory movement like the 'eternal recurrence of the same things' or the biological or morphological 'organic' succession of periods)." Paradoxically, Nietzsche-like relativism "inevitably becomes dogmatic" in its insistence on the absolute truth of its relativism, "for it is only meaningful to speak of relativism where an 'absolute' is in some sense assumed. The weakness and the half-heartedness of such 'daring thinkers' as Nietzsche and Spengler is that their relativism only abolishes the absolute in appearance."²²³ Here, Lukács, echoing challenges posed by Heidegger and Irigaray, accuses Nietzsche of succumbing to the totalizing thinking that he proclaims to be so boldly overturning. "Actuated either by doubt or despair," Nietzsche (and Spengler) "thus stand revealed as a decadent version of the very rationalism or religiosity they mean to oppose."²²⁴ Whereas Heidegger sees Nietzsche's thought falling back into a metaphysics, and Irigaray finds his thought hemmed in by a solipsistic lull of a masculinist heterosexism, Lukács suggests that Nietzsche's thought was produced and

²²³ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1968), 187

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 188.

contained by bourgeois capitalism. Nietzsche's "relativism," so the implication goes, is the reified "absolute reality" of competitive capitalism that mystifies the systematic inequalities and dehumanization perpetrated by capitalism's systematic effects. Such a thinking presences the world of capitalist exchange in a way that denies its historical and thus inherently partial nature.

Nietzsche, it is true, has some sense of how bureaucratic capitalism and the world to which it gives rise has just this kind of homogenizing effect on the possibilities of individuality:

Once we possess that common economic management of the earth that will soon be inevitable, mankind will be able to find its best meaning as a machine in the service of this economy – as a tremendous clockwork composed of ever smaller, ever more subtly "adapted" gears; as an ever-growing superfluity of all dominating and commanding elements; as a whole of tremendous force, whose individual factors represent *minimal forces, minimal values*.²²⁵

He seems to suggest that it is a world in which "the consumption of man and mankind becomes more and more economical and the 'machinery' of interests and services is integrated ever more intricately" against which the "overman" defines himself.²²⁶ To the degree that the overman defies and overcomes the leveling technologies of his time, he is suggestive of a way of life that resists the technologically determined tempo of his time. Some forms of leftist thought have, on this basis, tried to combine Nietzsche's instinct for ferreting out the reifying effects of social organization with particular readings of the "overman" that would mark a moment of opening within the articulation of socialism's resistance to capitalism.

²²⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 463.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 463.

These thinkers tap into something similar to what Theodor Adorno recognized about how theory marks out the space of desire in relation to the necessity of action: “The fact that some live without material labor and, like Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, take pleasure in their spirit – that unjust privilege – also indicates that possibility exists for everyone; all the more so when the technical forces of production are at a stage that makes it possible to foresee the global dispensation from material labor.” This fact, Adorno claimed, captured the “infinitely progressive aspect of the separation of theory and practice” and suggests that an ethos of nobility underwrites the qualitative enhancement of the human condition implicit in, though sometimes forgotten by, a leftist politics. Theory sustains a “surplus” that allows “spirit” to orient its activity towards the emancipation of society rather than its mere reproduction and which repudiates the anti-political actionism based on so called “material practice.” Mere “praxis without surplus would be pure concretism.”²²⁷

Marx had similarly noted this relationship between theory and practice in his introduction to the *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*. Marx argued that philosophy remains in an ambiguous relationship to the world that it addresses. As Alex Callinicos summarizes this relationship: “Philosophy, in its propensity to invert subject and predicate, thought and reality, reflects the self-estranged society which denies and alienates the human essence. At the same time, by presenting an image of a world in which alienation has been overcome, philosophy contains the aspiration to transform the world.”²²⁸ But again, where Marx imagines the rift between philosophy (idea) and world (reality) being healed through a transformation of “reality, an act which, by creating a

²²⁷ Theodore Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 266 - 267.

²²⁸ Alex Callinicos, *Marxism and Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 34 - 35.

rational world, will make redundant the vision of such a world ...,” Nietzsche’s Zarathustrian vision always undercuts such a synthesis in its experience of the ongoing, differential play of forces.

Nietzsche’s thinking is attractive for leftist thought, in part, because it can inform questions about the affective content of our social and political imaginations in a way that avoids settling down into some final “meaning.” In a sense, Nietzsche has offered to post-holocaust forms of “Marxism” a strategy for addressing the question of a people’s desire for meaning – as it is experienced in conditions of late capitalism, or from the projections of the socialist imagination, or as it operates in fascisms of various types. That desire for meaning seems to be imbricated with the political in a fundamental way, even as it remains excessive to the institutions and calculations of rational government. In reference to our most virulent experience of an organized, government-level fascism, for example, Orwell recognized that Nazi fascism has a psychological advantage over “any hedonistic conception of life.” It recognizes that “human beings don’t only want comfort, safety, short working-hours, hygiene, birth-control and, in general common sense; they also, at least intermittently, want struggles and self-sacrifice, not to mention drums, flags and loyalty-parades.” Where socialism and capitalism “said to people, ‘I offer you a good time,’ Hitler has said to them ‘I offer you struggle, danger and death,’ and as a result a whole nation flings itself at his feet.”²²⁹ Precisely because much of Nietzsche’s thought is cast at a mythical level, it can engage the rhetoric of fascism by tacking along its narrative of desire and deflecting that desire, reshaping it into a counter-narrative that troubles the authority of its conclusions. Nietzschean thinking, we have

²²⁹ George Orwell, “Review: *Mein Kemp* by Adolph Hitler,” in *Writers on World War II*, ed. by Mordecai Richter (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 42.

suggested, gives us a way of addressing the questions of meaning (of our desire for meaning) that are always entwined with the politics that we endorse in a way that guards against the processes of exclusion, enclosure, and oppression that typically accompany human stories about meaning.

On the other hand, even as we recognize that attractiveness of the Nietzschean thinking of difference, critical theorists have to be careful about the different trajectories that Nietzsche's diagnosis of the relationship between modern man's economic organization and his mediocrity might take. In particular, we should be worried about the field of activity, that is to say, the range of "totality," against and within which the "overman" articulates himself. For as Nietzsche continues to muse about the increasing economic organization of the world, we get the sense that the overman stands above the masses: "he needs the opposition of the masses, of the 'leveled,' a feeling of distance from them! He stands on them, he lives off them."²³⁰ The masses merely exist to stage the ultimately more important drama of the overman's struggle. This version of the overman crystallizes in the figure of someone like Howard Roark, the protagonist of Ayn Rand's *Fountainhead*, who objectifies the external world that confronts him as so much material for his creative fulgurations. We could say, then, expanding on Lukács's observations, that Nietzsche's thought is absolute because it reproduces, rather than challenges, the ideological structure of capitalism, granting to the capitalist actor the illusion that his partial perspective grants him a grasp of social totality. The heroization of the atomistic individual who constantly "differentiates" himself in an aestheticized narrative of capitalist consumption and production mystifies the economic relations that

²³⁰ *The Will to Power*, 464.

structure value within this dramaturgical space; such an individual literally can only see the world in a limited way, but on this basis he imagines that all the world is a stage.²³¹

Lukács' Marx, at least, always remains in tension with the differencing implications of Nietzsche's epistemological perspectivism. Because such thinking sustains the partial perspective of the atomistic individual, Lukács argues, it militates against a perspective capable of grasping the social totality. In doing so, Nietzsche's thinking always works to undo the possibility of the proletariat becoming conscious for-itself. In promoting this blindness, Nietzsche's thought sustains the bourgeois world that it putatively opposes. Lukács' explicitly makes this link between an ability to perceive the social totality and the achievement of solidarity in class consciousness:

Reality can only be understood and penetrated as a totality, and only a subject which is itself a totality is capable of this penetration ... *only the class can actively penetrate the reality of society and transform it in its entirety.* For this reason 'criticism' advanced from a standpoint of class, is criticism from a total point of view and hence it provides the dialectical unity of theory and practice. In dialectical unity it is at once cause and effect, mirror and motor of the historical and dialectical process. ...²³²

From this perspective, Nietzsche's heroization of an aesthetic response to the play of forces in which we find ourselves inhabiting gains its power from a fundamental occlusion: it accepts the field of possibility structured by capitalist relations to be the unproblematic totality of reality.

²³¹ The observations are amplified in Lukács' essay on Rosa Luxemburg, where it is precisely "the point of view of totality" that distinguishes bourgeois and Marxist thought. Ultimately, it could be said that Nietzsche's thought is bourgeois thought because it "judges social phenomena ... from the point of the individual [and this tendency is historical, says the footnote]. No path leads from the individual to the totality." Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, "The Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg," trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1968), 27 – 28.

²³² *Ibid.*, 39.

If nothing else, Lukács' objections to Nietzsche's thought alerts us to the limits of using Nietzsche's thinking of difference for leftist ends. Nancy Love's typology of an "ideal synthesis" between "Marx" and "Nietzsche" offers a more systematic account of this limit, and the series of general tensions that she identifies might help foreground any effort to productively bring Marx and Nietzsche's thinking together. First, anyone trying to enact such a synthesis would seem caught in the contradiction of Nietzschean skepticism and Marxian science. As a Nietzschean skeptic, Love's ideal synthesizer would be incapable of transforming society; he is incapable of finding a rational basis for the collective action that underwrites social change. As the Marxist scientist, however, he is fated to a life denying asceticism. Second, this synthesizer must grapple with the disjuncture between Nietzschean individualism and Marxian socialism. "As Nietzschean individualist, he would liberate individuals from herd psychology, but as Marxian socialist, he would liberate species-man from economic individualism."²³³ Lastly, their contrasting criticisms of modern economics suggests that Nietzsche's thought is incapable of offering a systematic critique of capitalist forms of oppression (of recognizing the systemic effects of capital) or of informing collective resistances to these oppressions. Nietzschean play can only suggest individual resistances to capitalism's colonizing power: "Without a scientific analysis of capitalist production, of its structure and of forces within it capable of transforming it, he cannot suggest a coherent class strategy."²³⁴

²³³ Nancy S. Love. *Marx, Nietzsche, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 202.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

III. The Problem Iterated: Unity vs. Difference in Feminist Theory

With an eye cast toward the critical vocabulary that we are fashioning, and thus at the “we” that we are crafting, we should note that similar difficulties about how a Nietzschean thinking of difference might inform collective political action is at the forefront of those who seek to introduce his thinking into feminist theory. Those postmodern approaches that follow Nietzsche in decentering the subject, critics claim, threaten the empowerment of the disenfranchised. Individuals who have been systematically denied identity need the dignity conferred by a socially recognized identity, and, at a political level, such a decentering unseats the unity necessary for efficacious collective action, threatening instead an atomistic disavowal of the need for political solidarity. Thus, though feminists of various types recognize a complicity between the traditional assumptions about identity and subjectivity enshrined in Western philosophy and the exercise of a specifically masculine power, many remain wary of too radically contesting these assumptions. As Wendy Brown notes, despite “extensive feminist critiques of masculinist models and practices of the subject,” a more thoroughgoing “deconstruction of the subject incites palpable feminist panic.”²³⁵

This panic reflects a belief that the insistent deconstructive impulse of post-modern thought – that is, its refusal of identity – could only serve to weaken the political solidarity that is necessary for efficacious political intervention. Though there might be some merit in the charge that the thoroughgoing skepticism that sometimes finds expression in Nietzschean thinking lacks the resources for developing the action coordinating capacities necessary for democratic forms of insurgency and government,

²³⁵ Wendy Brown. *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 39.

we will argue that Nietzschean thinking, as it is diffracted, or articulated, in entering into relationship with Marxism and feminism, offers a necessary complement for admirably imagining our intersubjective practices and our conceptualizations of collective politics. That is part of what's being born(e) by this narrative.

IV. Everybody Loves Somebody – Sometimes

In any case, despite the indisputable differences that separate “Marxist” and “Nietzschean” thinking, the historical relationship between these thinkings is far from being merely one of division. Their convergence within (at least putatively) leftist critical theories is an empirical fact. From almost the time that Nietzsche’s thinking began to travel across Europe, there have been attempts to bring these two thinkers into rapport with one another. Anatoly Lunasharski, Alexander Bogdanov, and Maxim Gorky early on sought to fabricate a “‘Nietzschean Marxism’ or a ‘Socialist Nietzscheanism’” whose “common ground ... is obviously the battle against the existing order of bourgeois-Christian society and the striving for a new of humanity, a ‘new man.’”²³⁶ In England, the Fabians tried to bring Nietzsche’s radically aristocratic thought to bear on their efforts to free the working class and gain equality for women.²³⁷

In France, a distinct flavor of the unlikely combination of Nietzsche and Marx begins to emerge, a style of reading the movement of capital through the lens of Nietzschean reimaginings of desire. Georges Bataille’s constellated categories of “sovereignty,” “heterogeneity,” “transgression,” and “general economy” began to construct a Nietzschean inflected, post-fascist vision of Marxism that draws out the

²³⁶ Ernst Behler. “Nietzsche in the Twentieth Century,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 291. A more sustained treatment of this necessary moment, and the attractiveness of reading Nietzschean motifs into the theorization of both the process of creating and the ongoing character of this “new man” (sic) is taken up in chapter five.

²³⁷ Ibid.

questions of existential possibility that inhere in the Marxist promise of a material plenum.²³⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have most prominently pursued this transgressive logic in the name of an ostensibly Marxist reading of capital. Despite their allegiance to Nietzschean forms of thinking, they nonetheless, according to Deleuze, “have always remained Marxists.” What differentiates their Marxism, they imply, is that they refuse the comfort (and thus, perhaps, the political quietism?) of capitalism’s dialectical collapse. Rather, they are impressed by the ability of capital to reproduce itself, to reinvigorate itself.

It’s that we don’t believe in a political philosophy that would not be centered around the analysis of capitalism and its development. What interests us most is the analysis of capitalism as an immanent system that constantly pushes back its proper limits, and that always finds them again on a larger scale, because the limit is Capital itself.²³⁹

By analyzing capital in terms of an always proliferating power, these thinkers allow us to orient Marxist thought to an economic world significantly different than the world envisioned by Marx himself. In particular, their rethinking of desire, and their insistence that desire operates, in terms of phenomenological and psychological experience, on both individual and social planes, allows us to better grasp something about the relationship of our received understandings of desire to the totalizing, regenerative power of capital. But even if these forms of analysis are fruitful for understanding something about how the totality of capitalism is sustained by a seemingly unceasing movement of

²³⁸ Georges Bataille, “The Psychological Structure of Fascism,” “Nietzsche and the Fascists,” in *Visions of Excess*, translated by Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985). See also *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, Vol. 1: *Consumption*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1988), *The Accursed Share*, Volume II: *The History of Eroticism*, and *The Accursed Share*, Volume III: *Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 1993).

²³⁹ As quoted by Jacques Derrida in his eulogy for Deleuze. “I’ll Have to Wander All Alone,” trans. by David Kammerman, from Scot Moore, *The Notebook of Contemporary Continental Philosophy* (online), http://www.baylor.edu/~Scott_Moore/Continental.html.

deterritorialization and reterritorialization, it remains unclear how such analyses might inform a politics that resists the systematic inequalities that are created and sustained by this ongoing deformation and reformation of the social totality. Without a locus of resistance to this totality, that is, without a richer account of collective identity, how can the “local resistances” that some leftist thinkers have drawn out of this particularly French encounter between Marx and Nietzsche avoid being appropriated by the capitalist logic that it critiques?

Given the insistence of this question, a more circumscribed appropriation of Nietzschean thought might be in order. A Marxist thinking that draws on the Nietzschean notion of difference in order to guard against the dangers of a totalizing perspective, unable to offer a coherent way of responding to the dislocating movement of capital, and unable to escape the assimilating movement of capital that turns all resistance into product, might well transform Nietzsche’s laughing embrace of the contingency of a Silenic world into a resigned gravity. Such melancholy, in fact, tempers Adorno’s voice, and marks a limit of his reception of Nietzsche’s thought within critical theory. Though Adorno’s corpus, in opposition to Lukács’, and in common with many postmodern and feminist thinkers that he thereby locates within the lineage of critical theory, is positively influenced by Nietzsche’s intellectual presence (which of course entails the fracturing of that presence), the very “melancholy” of Adorno’s alternative to Nietzsche’s “gay science” confirms something of the Lukácian suspicion of difference. Adorno recognizes in Nietzsche’s thinking an indifference to how specifically capitalist and patriarchal regimes of power structured his efforts at an aesthetic self-fashioning, and thus an inability to honor the very nobility of forgetting that he sought to craft. Rather

than living above his *ressentiment* against time's "it was," Nietzsche, Adorno suggests, finds in the "others" excluded by capitalist and patriarchal privilege a target for his *ressentiment*, and a stage for his fulfillment.

At the same time, however, Adorno recognizes in Nietzsche's thought resources for a more filigree form of critical theory. Adorno appreciates Nietzsche on several levels; he "honors" Nietzsche, Martin Jay argues, "for his trenchant critique of mass culture and politics, his ruthless exposure of the bankruptcy of traditional metaphysics, and his penetrating insights into the ambiguous dialectic of enlightenment."²⁴⁰ Erin Bauer adds that Nietzsche provides Adorno with a model for an appreciation of the aesthetic dimensions of social criticism. This attentiveness to aesthetics plays itself out in their work on at least two levels. On the one hand, both Nietzsche and Adorno treat art and culture as part of their "materialist critique of society." Both turn to analyses of cultural products as indicators of underlying formations of power. On the other hand, both Adorno and Nietzsche's texts are themselves crafted to appeal to aesthetic criteria of judgment, both "recognize and emphasize the performative dimension of their critiques," enacting "their criticism by resorting to an aphoristic, essayistic, and ironic style of writing."²⁴¹

This attention to the performance of their thought is not incidental to its content; in fact, both Adorno and Nietzsche are committed to the idea that "form" and "content" are inextricably intertwined, and they both consciously utilize ways of writing that help to communicate their general point that, as Adorno once starkly put it, "The whole is the

²⁴⁰ Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 22.

²⁴¹ Bauer, 5.

false.”²⁴² Their appeal to “fragmentary” rhetorical gambits – the aphorism, the essay, irony – reflects their shared suspicion of appeals to totality. Their writing styles reflect both an effort to see the world in non-totalizing terms and an effort to craft their alternative visions of the world in ways that call these visions themselves into question: “By acknowledging the limits of thought and the potential for error in both the repressive-regressive and progressive-emancipatory dimensions of values and norms, Nietzsche’s perspectivism turns, like Adorno’s negative-dialectical thought, to the undogmatic reevaluation of all values.”²⁴³ The world in which we always already find ourselves, the stories in which we are ensconced, are thus contestable. We can refigure these stories. But the stories through which they seek to refigure that world, Nietzsche and Adorno realized, should thus themselves be figured in a way that always interrupts their quest for final solutions. Both thinkers “reject teleological thought and refuse to construct a concrete and positive utopian model. The utopian dimension of their thought can be located only in their negativity.”²⁴⁴

Nietzsche’s presence in Adorno’s thought, then, gives impetus to Adorno’s effort to think a post-totalitarian Marxism. Or to formulate its as a problematic within Adorno’s thought: Adorno’s appropriation of Nietzsche marks his effort to rethink the relationship of Marxist thought to the social totality that it addresses, and, by implication, to the social alternative towards which it gestures. Adorno, through the articulation of a “negative dialectic” that is imbued with a Nietzschean refusal of synthesis, works to create the possibility of thinking, speaking, and adapting a post-totalizing Marxism. On

²⁴² Adorno, *Minima Moralia, : Reflections from a Damaged Life*. Trans. by E. F. N. Jephcott. New York: Verso, 1999), 50.

²⁴³ Baeur, 4.

²⁴⁴ Baeur, 5.

one level, the impetus of Adorno's Nietzschean inflected project is a practice meant to inculcate in his readers a possible form of comportment for pursuing Marxist goals in a post-holocaust world (which is not to claim that this is an adequately comprehensive idea of praxis, but merely to reflect that actionists' denunciations of theory fail to recognize the degree to which theory itself is a practical activity).

The necessity of *this thinking as a fundamental site of praxis* was very real to a thinker proximate to the holocaust, that "rupture," Emile Fackenheim observes, "that ruptures philosophy." For Adorno, "The premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again."²⁴⁵ If Marx's 11th Thesis on Feurbach signals a founding moment of the critical lineage in which Adorno thought and which he sought to perpetuate, the rupture of the holocaust seems to have brought home to him something of the particular character of that thought and the practical political activity that it seeks to inform: "What fifty years ago for a short period of time in the eyes of those who nourished the all too abstract and illusory hope for a total transformation might have appeared justified – that is violence – after the experience of National Socialist and Stalinist atrocities and in the face of the longevity of totalitarian repression is inextricably imbricated in what needs to be transformed."²⁴⁶ That rupture had not only broken the dream of totality that had organized leftist thinking of earlier generations, it was to lead many thinkers to conclude that the thinking of totality and presence – so embedded in our Western thought – is itself is complicit with the terror of totalitarian politics.

This is not to claim that Adorno totally abandoned the category of the "total." He recognized, at the very least, that the concept of the "total" could be a useful fiction that

²⁴⁵ "Education After Auschwitz," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 191.

²⁴⁶ Adorno, "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis," in *Critical Models*, 268.

would allow one to make connections between particular cultural facts and the forms of structural oppression that they (somehow) reflected. At the same time, Adorno's thinking respects the power of instrumental and capitalist fictions of totality, and his use of the category of the total might be thought of as an instructive hyperbole that thematizes, in its exaggeration, the colonizing force of capitalist ideology.

A brief comparison to the Foucauldian notion of "power" might be helpful here. Foucault sometimes speaks as if, and has been misconstrued as merely saying, that power operates as a monistic force. At other points, however, Foucault argues that he doesn't have a theory of power. Rather, he argues, that he only speaks of specific relations between forces. "Power," for Foucault, only makes sense as a particular configuration, which can thus draw our attention to distributions of forces at particular sites. Power, as a relation, Foucault claims, cannot be conceived "without the means of escape or possible flight. Every power relationship implies, at least *in potentia*, a strategy of struggle, in which the two forces are not super-imposed, do not lose their specific nature, or do not finally become confused. Each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit."²⁴⁷ As such, the category of "power" allows him to suggest a site of action, a place where something is happening, rather than a static, total and utterly reified social field. Adorno makes use of the notion of the social "totality" in much the same way. That totality is sustained by the interrelationship of all its elements, and thus a dialectical attentiveness to those elements can open up the "totality" to contestation and possible reconfiguration. Both thinkers use these metaphysical misonomers – the "total" and "power," respectively – in their efforts to initiate and sustain a certain rhetoric of refusal, a certain kind of guerilla politics at the level of theory. That resistance, above all else, is against the final

²⁴⁷ Foucault, *The Subject and Power*, 225.

conclusion of a thinking for whom the notion of total, final solutions is anaethema. Thus, as a matter of tactics, Adorno's thinking will sometimes use the category of the "total" in the service of a thinking that is ultimately anti-totalitarian.

Such a thinking is beginning, in fact, to recast what it sees as the illusory nature and promise of social totality (and of unitary notions of identity) even as it retains those categories out of responsibility and tactical necessity. The critical theorist remains responsible for theorizing the totality of possible social action, but she or he has come to realize that any such effort will remain contestable by other perspectives, or subject positions, from "within" this social "totality." In contrast to Saussure's idea that all signs gather their meaning in terms of their differences from all other signs (and thus from its place within that totality), we see developing here a logic in which the various perspectives within a generalized field displace one another and thus constantly subvert that field's illusory pretensions of totality. That same logic inflects the form of critical theory that is being articulated here; in the paragraphs that follow, such a critical theory's totality of reference is displaced under the signature of "Adorno" by the confluence and disjuncture of its influences, particularly of "Nietzsche" and "Marx."

Adorno's reception of Nietzsche's thought is instructive because even though he appreciates the power of that thinking, he also imposes limits on its usefulness within a leftist critical theory. Adorno senses that Nietzsche's "gay science," his *amor fati*, is somehow out of place against the backdrop of an administered, post-holocaust world, and that Nietzsche's joy is somehow counterfeit, purchased by a unexamined faith in the merely epiphenomenal experience of capitalism. Nonetheless, by attending to the possibilities and the limits that he sees in Nietzsche's thinking, Adorno productively,

though never perfectly, begins to integrate Nietzschean insights and attitudes into critical theory. Never perfectly: that's what's at stake in this story of integration, and Adorno's precedent-setting turn towards Nietzsche is worth pondering because he calls attention to the rifts between Nietzsche's reactionary, bourgeois-aristocratic-sexist appeals and the Marxist inspired language of emancipation from which Adorno's brand of critical theory gains its original impetus. To say it slightly differently, his reception of Nietzsche within critical theory (one might say his desire to assimilate his thinking for critical theory), which itself limits the Marxist drive towards total social revolution, is itself crossed by the Marxist demand for a systematic critique of capitalism and an efficacious logic of collective action.

Adorno's legacy within critical theory is also important because it thematizes how both the Marxist and Nietzschean narratives that inform his thought are either inattentive or outrightly hostile to the emancipatory difficulties experienced by women. Adorno finds this blindness to the concerns of women unacceptable, and his contestation of both Marx and Nietzsche on this front announces, from its putative beginnings, that critical theory is also a feminist project. In chapter two, we tried to show that Nietzsche's famed misogyny is subjected within his work to an overcoming that makes his thought attractive to certain strands of critical feminist thought. There, we rehearsed how Nietzsche's playful encounter with the discursive generalization of "woman" uncovers unexpected feminist possibilities; in chapter three, we followed Irigaray's contestatory embrace of those possibilities in order to get clear about the limits of this logic within feminism. As we note below, Adorno weighs in on Nietzsche's shortcomings regarding "woman," but

he is also attentive to how “woman,” the feminine/feminist limit, crosses Marxist thought as well.

Aside from Engels’ treatment in “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State,” the founding texts of Marxism tend to underthematize the specific oppressions suffered by women and thus fail to theorize how an account of that oppression might be integrated into a broad ranging critical approach. As Heidi Hartmann has noted, this blindspot is to be expected from forms of analysis that approach the oppression of women as a subset of class oppression. “In doing so,” she argues, Marxist forms of analysis “all give short shrift to the object of feminist analysis, the relations between women and men.”²⁴⁸ The very power of Marxist categories in explaining the movement of capital and the systematic inequalities that it produces, that is to say the impersonality of these categories, has a difficult time explaining “why particular people fill particular places” – why, that is, men typically enjoy positions of power and privilege within capitalist societies. Marxist analyses, left to their own devices, are inadequate for explaining the interrelationship between capitalist and patriarchal forms of oppression; the glasses that Marx trains on the social world need to be augmented by other perspectives, by alternative pairs of glasses.

Adorno begins to shape this competing vision *within* critical theory. In contrast to Marx, Adorno saw instrumental reason, of which capitalism was but one expression, as the root cause of domination. As such, Adorno links the oppression of women in society with the general logic of domination that inheres within a means-ends rationality. With Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno notes that “Women have no personal

²⁴⁸ Heidi Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism,” 536.

part in the efficiency on which the civilization is based.”²⁴⁹ Adorno’s thinking here draws proximate to Irigaray’s as he suggests that reason itself is masculine in its epochal, ideological character. In a world in which men understood themselves in terms of their millennial “dream of acquiring absolute mastery over nature, of converting the cosmos into an immense hunting-ground,”²⁵⁰ it is clear that “Woman is not a being in her own right, a subject.”²⁵¹ Women’s physical weakness is coded by a male dominated society bent on the mastery of nature as “proof” of women’s objective status. Her place in this masculine economy of meaning (and in the more specifically material economy which it mirrors) is clear. She is equated with nature as part of an external world that men must master, that they want to master: “She became the embodiment of the biological function, the image of nature, the subjugation of which constituted that civilization’s title to fame.”²⁵²

Adorno also finds Nietzsche’s encounter with “woman” to be problematic. Nietzsche’s thought, as we have seen, is crossed by the limit of feminine and feminism, a limit that can be interpreted as the marker of a gross misogyny, but also, as a marker of that which is excessive to the enclosing movements of his thought. According to such a reading, the site of Nietzsche’s confrontation with “woman” is a dramaturgical space in which Nietzsche’s thought enacts a logic of overcoming. On Adorno’s reading, however, Nietzsche’s thinking about “woman” remains reactive and bourgeois. His thoroughgoing suspicion of the structures of power lurking behind the stories we tell ourselves, and his ability to offer plausible counter-stories, stops short, Adorno says, of adequately

²⁴⁹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming, (New York: Continuum, 1996), 247.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 248.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² *Ibid.*

scrutinizing “woman” as she is constructed within specifically capitalist societies. Taking “over a second-hand and unverified feminine nature from the Christian civilization that he otherwise so thoroughly mistrusted, finally brought his thought under the sway, after all, of bourgeois society. He fell for the fraud of saying ‘the feminine’ when talking of women.”²⁵³ Nietzsche imagines “femininity” within an economy of desire that always casts her as prey, making her into that principle of elusiveness that prepositions a masculine mastery: “Hence the perfidious advice not to forget the whip: femininity itself is already the effect of the whip.”²⁵⁴

Adorno’s reading of Nietzsche’s treatment of “woman” oversimplifies her appearance in his thought; he does not approach Irigaray’s subtle recognition of the weaknesses and the strengths afforded by the play of “woman” in Nietzsche’s thinking. Nietzsche, for example, seems aware that “femininity itself is already the effect of the whip.” In *The Gay Science*, for example, Nietzsche recounts the story of a sage who declaims, against the received understanding of the crowd, that “‘It is men’ ... who corrupt women; and all the failing of women should be atoned by and improved in men. For it is man who creates for himself the image of woman, and woman forms herself according to this image.’” The sage concludes, “‘Men need to be educated better!’” Of course, the sage is dismissed as a fool,²⁵⁵ but this passage suggests that Nietzsche recognized the constructed nature of both the figure of “woman” and his “truths” about her.

Nonetheless, in calling Nietzsche on his misogyny, placing it within the strictures of a bourgeois thinking, and in thus connecting it to a similar blindness in Marxist

²⁵³ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 96.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 126.

thinking, Adorno implies that responding to the oppression of women is central to the mission of critical theory. Empirically, the feminine/feminist limit again, in this moment of grafting, marks out a confluence, within a variation of western Marxism, of Nietzschean thought and feminist concern, and in doing so foregrounds a limit of Nietzschean informed influences on critical feminist theory. If the marriage of Marx and Nietzsche's thinking can be summarized as a series of tensions that reflect a central tension between "totality" and "difference," then the ongoing reappearance of the feminine/feminist other both iterates that tension and striates its field of play – both refiguring and differencing critical theory as it appears on the scene.

But note that these tensions, then, might do more than merely mark the "impossible heritage" and the resuscitated possibility of a thinking. They also get us to start thinking about what a relationship that inheres in difference might entail, to imagine how something like solidarity and community informed by difference, might begin to form. The effort to hold these thinkings in a productive tension, as important philosophical sources for a critical theory of politics, is already a matter of coalitional thinking.

* * * * *

Such a preface marks the necessity, but also the hesitation, with which we speak to and for the "other," and it also suggests of the philosophical and political stakes within certain articulations of contemporary feminist theory. In what follows, I want to trace out the bringing together of Nietzschean and Marxist motifs into a complementary proximity that has unfolded within a particular theoretical and practical space: perhaps we can tentatively call this space "post-standpoint" feminism. Though, as Love's typology of

synthetic paradoxes suggests, the polemical triumph of Nietzschean thought would spell disaster for a leftist politics, the questions that Nietzsche wrestles with illuminate the blind spots of an uncontaminated, outrightly Marxist approach and thus can further a critical theoretical project of social transformation. Between our desire for meta-theoretical synthesis of “Nietzsche” and “Marx” *and* our despair over the incommensurability of their thinking, there remains the possibility of a more pragmatically conceived relationship that sustains a tension in which their thinkings might productively supplement one another. One thread of feminism (which we trace below), in its insistence on its own emancipatory aims, is a site of such a production.

Such a confluence operates in the work of many contemporary intellectuals, but we can adequately get our bearings for how it has come to function within a certain strand of contemporary feminism by turning our attention to the projects of Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, and the recent work of Nancy Hartsock. Working themselves within the horizons of Nietzsche’s and Marx’s thinking, Butler and Haraway, meditating on the possibilities for agency within the horizons of a socially constructed subjectivity, offer forms of thinking to us that will help us to articulate this vision as it emerges out of a particular authorial subject position.²⁵⁶ In doing so, these thinkings turn us towards those specific limits of “our truth,” sketching for us the specific contents of who we are, and thus marking the engagements where we “become who we are.” In those engagements, however, we are perpetually confronted with horizons of difference that interrupt that

²⁵⁶ “Grammar is politics by other means ... Curiously, as for people before us in Western discourses, efforts to come to linguistic terms with the non-representability, historical contingency, artefactuality, and yet spontaneity, necessity, fragility, and stunning profusions of ‘nature’ can help us refigure the kind of persons we might be.” ... “multiply heterogenous, inhomogenous, accountable, and connected human agents.” ... “We must have agency – or agencies – without defended subjects.” Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 3.

becoming. These horizons, limits, and problematics, Butler and Haraway's Nietzschean tinted thinking reminds us, serve as sites for the reconstitution of our subjectivities as well as sites of their possible transformation. These sites suggest the limits of our logics of certitude and thus elicit and inflect new ways of hearing, speaking, reading, writing, thinking, acting – ultimately, different ways of comporting ourselves towards those who are structurally excluded from the positions in which we find ourselves thinking. The ethos constellated by these capacities, in turn, can productively inform efforts to imagine collective subjectivities, both as an organizing principle for insurgent forms of politics and in contouring our meta-political vision.

This vision of critical theory might be narrated in innumerable ways, but it strikes us that paying attention to the subject position from which it emerges and which it troubles is, at least as a certain kind of exemplar, fundamental to the kind of critical voice that it seeks to articulate. That, again, is why the proper subject of this chapter is feminism. This articulation of critical theory emerges within (at the space of) an encounter that troubles the distance of articulation – an encounter with women whom the author must count as allies, and some of whom, at some times and some places, he knows more intimately, but whose difference always impinges on his understanding of a shared future. It breaks up the speed and certainty of his approach. For *him*, as he articulates the critical theory that he would practice and teach, women are still a fundamental matrix, but this time they are an active matrix who always speaks “the first word of our politics,” that always interrupts our thick sense of who we are. Women, if we take their interests and their differences seriously, prevent us from passively accepting the philosophy of the

masters; they change it, them, me, us by introducing a moment of irrecuperable difference into the forms of critical thinking that they have bequeathed us.

V. Postsocialist Desire and the Problem of the Morning After.

Nancy Fraser begins to essay a “postsocialist” problematic that frames contemporary forms of feminist critical thought by comparing this experience to an interruption of the desire for (the consummation of) justice. For Fraser, the revolutionary desire that had underwritten her political commitments, and which had, however inchoately, marked out the coherence of her intellectual positions, has become a source of disillusionment. The confident rush of seduction and consummation that coded leftist expectation prior to 1989 has given way to the hollow sense of “the morning after,” invoking a confusion about the possibilities and consequences of historical transformation in the world of late capitalism. One might argue with Fraser’s dating of the onset of this confusion (during the same historical period that witnessed Adorno’s famous post-holocaust melancholy, the American left was experiencing an identity crisis coming to grips with Stalinism and the politically hostile climate of the McCarthy-era 50s), but few would disagree with her core diagnosis. The desire for social justice has been interrupted; it is, in the changed context of a new morning, a desire whose meaning has strangely morphed, now refigured in the phenomenological experience of a distinct “mood.”²⁵⁷ Our beloved, when it all has come to pass, is suddenly sullied to our experience – somehow emblematic, this morning, of promises that don’t come to pass, of reconciliations that never happen, and of the perniciously illusory experience of desire

²⁵⁷ Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the “Postsocialist” Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1.

itself. That mood, it seems, is still with us: from the triumph of Reaganism and Clinton's subsequent capitulation to welfare reform, the left, even the moderate left, finds itself unable to speak with conviction or to act with an enthusiasm for commitment.²⁵⁸

Fraser's sketch of the "postsocialist" condition links the desire for justice to our uncertainty about the political "we" with whom we would struggle to change the world. They are all questions about how we should imagine our relationships to other people, about how we should govern ourselves collectively. Importantly, Fraser realizes, our desire for a more just world is no longer a matter of immediate gratification, or securing and guarding a finally totalized presence. If that is the desire that underwrote, even if in a sublimated fashion, the political coherence of the left before 1989, then Fraser's effort to

²⁵⁸ Fraser catalogues three features of this somber postsocialist mood. The first of these "is the absence of any credible progressive vision of an alternative to the present order." The collapse of socialism is not merely the demise of a "set of actually existing institutional arrangements." More importantly, it signals the loss of "belief in the principal ideal that inspired struggles for social transformation for the last century and a half." Those who seek social justice, do not, in some sense, have a secure sense of the world that they are seeking to achieve. The second feature characteristic of this mood of the "morning after" is inextricably tied to this loss of identity: the revolutionary left's sober reappraisal of the consequences of orgasmic fusion: "Claims for the recognition of group difference have become intensely salient in the recent period, at times eclipsing claims for social equality." Fraser is quite concerned about how this shift reflects a shift in the self-understanding of large groups of political actors:

the most salient social movements are no longer economically defined "classes" who are struggling to defend their "interests," end "exploitation," and win "redistribution." Instead, they are culturally defined "groups" or "communities of value" who are struggling to defend their "identities," end "cultural domination," and win "recognition."

The third defining characteristic of the "postsocialist" condition is the deleterious effects of the global triumph of economic liberalism. Increasingly, Fraser reports, "those who are positioned to prosper in the global information economy rapidly leave behind the many more who are not." Current patterns of economic distribution deny to many adequate "access to clean water and air; education, contraception, and health care; paid work and nutritious food; freedom from torture and rape." The stark, material realities of many people's lives makes the clamor for identity seem the luxury of those positioned within post-material worldviews. The interests of many must be more urgently cast as a matter of survival.

Having posited these analytical categories, Fraser thinks that restricting one's understanding of social justice to either the "redistribution" or the "recognition" paradigms oversimplifies. Often, the systematic denial of a valued resource reflects patterns of racial, ethnic, or sexual segregation and regulation. The issue of a group's voice, of the degree to which it can be represented within the political arena at large, is often inextricable from the group's capacity to gain resources and secure its interests within the normal channels of the political-legislative process. Fraser, *Justice Interruptus*, 1 – 3.

metaphorically link the “postsocialist” problematic with the questions of desire is particularly suggestive. No longer can the desire for justice be reckoned in a naïve/romantic/horny language of youth. The compelling magic of that desire has undergone (is undergoing) a transformation in relationship to both material changes and the trajectory of its own experience of learning.

The reimagination of that desire, however, rather than its disavowal, seems particularly important to pursue precisely because of the mood that Fraser and others find besetting contemporary leftist politics. To begin, critical theory, and leftist politics in general, cannot cede the promise of desire to the free-market right. Desire, after all, is always central to the stories that prop up the certainty of this capitalist world, and capitalism’s uncanny ability to effectively utilize channels of desire seems fundamental to its reproduction. Its foundational rationales as a social organizing principle, from Hobbes onward, have begun by assuming that humans are, by nature, desiring beings of a particular type: the world is populated, from its unremembered beginnings, with humans pursuing the goods that they want. From a systems perspective, the question for capitalism is how to access the space of pleasure allowed the consumer, commodifying that pleasure in ways that perpetuate patterns of desire that capital can exploit to its advantage. And women, and their place in a masculine, heterosexual economy of desire, are not incidental to this reproduction. Any one who has been watching television for the past twenty years knows what that new sports car really is supposed to get you. If a leftist politics is to succeed, it cannot afford to abandon pleasure to capitalism. This creates a double task for any critical theory, particularly one that is organized around the notion of a “critical desire.” Beyond being responsible for a critique of the capitalist and

patriarchal desires in which it is articulated, a critical theory of politics must find a vocabulary that allows the left to embrace its alternative, emancipatory desire.

This leads to a second reason for articulating the relationship between critical theory and its desire(s). The movement for political change and for a more just political future needs passion in order to motivate collective action and sustain its normative vision. We must want a different world, and we must have an enthusiasm for sustaining its possibility, its reachability. Changing the world in which we live implies, at some level, a motivating desire for something akin to a utopian future.

And what of this utopia? What are its characteristics? We do not want to disavow desire's place in the world that arrives after the "revolution." We don't want a world of dehumanizing bureaucratic regularity. We want a world where pleasure is an integral part of our lives. Something like this was at work, no doubt, in the rise of the post-McCarthy left in the 60s. The Students for a Democratic Society, for example, spoke of a left organized around the idea of a society oriented towards "finding a meaning in life that is personally authentic; one which has full, spontaneous access to present and past experiences, one which easily unites the fragmented parts of personal history, one which openly faces problems which are troubling and unresolved; one with an intuitive awareness of possibilities, an active sense of curiosity, an ability and willingness to learn."²⁵⁹ Against the backdrop of the bureaucratic regularity of both industrial capitalist and Stalinist societies, the new left centered its critique of society on its alienating effects. They give voice to a desire for desire. Nonetheless, the still metaphysical notion of desire articulated by the new left remains inadequate; it gives us

²⁵⁹ Students for a Democratic Society, "The Port Huron Statement," in Jim Miller, *"Democracy is in the Streets": From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 332.

no clear idea as to how we should differentiate the critical practices that we endorse from the impotent infatuation with violence and “total” revolution, or from the lazy fusions of hippie gratification.

Fraser, then, sets a task for those of us on the left who have experienced a crisis of desire. If desire itself, both materially and tropically, has become problematic for the left, and if desire, both tropically and materially, is constitutive of critical theory and practice, then the left has come to realize that it is as a desiring agent itself that it is sick. How might we, then, articulate this rethinking of desire? And, can we even begin? Wouldn't the desire to articulate this rethinking itself be a product of the desire it rethinks?

The doubled movement of a “critical desire” that we have begun to articulate in this dissertation offers us one path beyond the pathos of resignation that debilitates the contemporary left. If it is true that some overarching notion of desire predominates in our culture, then the literal and tropic force of that conceptualization is fundamental to the ideologically infused practices of our lifeworlds. And if that's the case, critical theory finds it necessary to describe the role of desire in the reproduction of oppressive economic/social relations. In pursuing this aim, however, the critical theorist finds his or her work opening onto a second task: he or she begins to offer a picture of what an alternative imagination of desire might look like, to reimagine the desire that animates him or her as a critical theorist. The theorist might find this reimagination of desire infusing the breadth of his or her thinking about politics on a variety of levels, from the personal to the meta-political.

VI. The Site of Feminism and Its Standpoints

The debates that have raged within academic feminism about its own self-understanding, about the proper contours of a subject called “woman” or about whether such a subjectivity is possible or desirable, are more than abstract chatter; they mark specific crises for feminist thought and practice writ large.²⁶⁰ The common sense notion that feminism represents the struggle of women against their oppression in a patriarchally organized society has, in the last twenty years, been troubled by disturbing questions about who these women are, about which women have and should determine the characteristics, rights and interests of women. Marxists, poststructuralists, queer theorists and women of color have all pointed out that the feminism of the 60s and 70s tended to focus on the concerns and struggles of white, middle-class, heterosexual women. Regardless of the merits of this initial focus, these critics argue, such a feminism occludes the sometimes very different oppressions faced by women who were not included within its purview. Attempts to work through the agonistic struggle between the dialectically (and heterosexually) opposed pair “man” and “woman,” critics claim, can offer little solace to those not included in the space of this dialectic. As such, these critics have sought to complicate and enrich the notion of “woman” that in some sense underwrites a feminist politics. This effort has gone beyond merely suggesting that any such notion of “woman” must be understood as a socio-political construction rather than a biological or anatomical category. In particular, these critics have sought to create a general vocabulary that allows women to articulate their specific positions while remaining

²⁶⁰ See, for example, Barbara Ryan, *Feminism and the Women's Movement: Dynamics of Change in Social Movement Ideology and Activism* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 46 – 64.

flexible about the differences between them, as well as those differences that evolve over time.

These questions of feminist solidarity have been taken up by an effort, inchoate in some respects, to insinuate Nietzschean reformulations of desire into a form of thinking originally nourished by Marxist and more traditional feminist intellectual sources. Thus, that impossible task, a leftist thinking that draws on both Nietzsche and Marx finds its pragmatic application in an unexpected site, at a site they themselves typically couldn't see. We will rehearse the texture of that site by looking at how the Nietzschean motif of difference, particularly as it iterated in the work of Judith Butler and Donna Haraway, introduces a logic that radicalizes Nancy Hartsock's own Lukácsian inspired notion of a "feminist standpoint." Butler and Haraway's projects utilize Nietzschean motifs as a tool, and in doing so they transform these resources. Thus we might say that the way in which they utilize Nietzsche's thought draws out the possibilities *and* limits of Nietzschean thought within feminist and leftist thinking. Rather than merely taming Nietzsche's thought, these women have dignified him with conversation. For though Butler and Haraway's Nietzschean tinted thinking converges, at certain points, with Hartsock's formulation of a Marxist inspired stand-point theory, that confluence does not suggest, even in tracing out the transformation of Hartsock's original formulations, a synthesis of these approaches; rather, this articulation is meant to preserve a productive agonism between "Nietzsche," "Marx," and the feminist interlocutors with whom they speak.

Kathi Weeks' helps us draw a direct connection between Marx, Nietzsche and the maturation of Hartsock's notion of standpoint theory. As Weeks notes, there "are some

suggestive parallels between the role of labor in Marxist thought and the role of the will to power in Nietzschean thought." She argues that by "reading labor through the lens of recent interpretations of the will to power we can highlight the immanent and materialist dimensions of this fundamental category." Both labor and the will to power function, Weeks claims, "as a principle of internal genesis or as an ontology of practice." Furthermore, both concepts are claims "about the constitutive force of practices, rather than a claim about the essence of things."²⁶¹

As Weeks points out, postmodernist critics who accuse standpoint theories of being based "upon a philosophical or scientific claim about who women are" – and thus falling prey to the oversimplifications of biological and/or cross-cultural essentialisms – misrepresent those theories. Nancy Hartsock's reconsideration of her own version of feminist standpoint theory makes this misrepresentation clear. Hartsock continues to maintain that the degree to which "woman" has served to figure the "other" around which patriarchal, heterosexual, capitalist, and technoscientific forms of social organization have defined themselves, the space of woman's consciousness – its unfolding in the places in which its subjectivity has been consigned – offers a privileged point of departure for launching attacks on these enshrined orders. Patriarchy has not existed independent of technological and economic order – rather, it has mapped on to these spheres of organization in ways that inflect the specific and historically situated self-understandings of the figure of "woman." It is just this specificity, rather than some trans-historical notion of "woman," that Hartsock has now come to emphasize.

Responding to the criticisms of Teresa de Lauretis, Jane Flax, Iris Young, Susan

²⁶¹ Kathi Weeks, "Feminist Standpoint Theories and the Return of Labor," in *Marxism in the Postmodern Age: Confronting the New World Order*. Edited by Antonio Callari, Stephen Cullenberg, and Carole Biewener (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995), 295.

Heckman, Kathy Ferguson, and Wendy Brown, Hartsock, in the "Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited," re-presents her notion of "standpoint" as necessarily being "standpoints," as always historical, always politically, culturally and economically situated perspectives. Her early formulations of standpoint, she admits, "did not give proper attention to differences."²⁶²

This rethinking of the different to the total is within the ambit of Lukács' own problematic efforts to deal with the category of the total and its relationship to standpoint. "Standpoint," she claims, following Lukács' 1967 Introduction to *History and Class Consciousness*, must be rethought in terms of a practical, dynamic activity that goes beyond what the proletariat or women think; rather a "standpoint" should be thought of as "a technical theoretical device that can allow for the creation of better (more objective, more liberatory) accounts of the world," ... offering "the theoretical conditions for creating alternatives."²⁶³ Hartsock follows Lukács', according to her reading, in realizing the importance (for a critical politics) of being able to sustain difference in response to the social totality against which it militates. In order, therefore, to "open up" her understanding of standpoint, she returns to the spirit of Lukács' own reconsideration of the interrelated problems of "Reification and the Standpoint of the Proletariat." Though never abandoning the effort to link the standpoint of the proletariat to the ability to recognize and transform the social totality that he inhabits, Lukács, Hartsock explains, saw in his original formulations a "failure to begin his analysis with labor rather than with the reified forms of commodities in capitalism."²⁶⁴

²⁶² Nancy Hartsock, "Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited," *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited and Other Essays* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 235.

²⁶³ Hartsock, 236.

²⁶⁴ Hartsock, 228.

Weeks, however, finds that the criticisms of a second group of postmodernists provocatively question how “labor” should be construed. These critics, who include Donna Haraway, Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, avoid oversimplifying standpoint theory as being based on naturalizing or transcendental assumptions. Rather, they seem more concerned with how such theories tend to reinscribe the socially and politically limited subject positions from which they gain their epistemological coherence. Weeks quotes Haraway's charge that the analogy between labor and "women's activity" that provides the standpoint of standpoint theory is "an ontological category permitting the knowledge of a subject, and so the knowledge of subjugation and alienation." Rather than merely dismissing these claims as erroneously labeling standpoint theory as "essentialist," or "foundationalist," Weeks uses the criticisms offered by Haraway *et al* as an opportunity for more clearly specifying the ways in which standpoint theory can both provide the coherence for efficacious political activity *and* guard against the dangers of any such identity.

This clarification, Weeks goes on to argue, can be achieved by pursuing a reconceptualization of how the key concept of “labor” functions within feminist standpoint theory. Hartsock first conceived of a feminist standpoint by drawing on the exemplary interrelationship between Marx’s epistemology and the normative impetus of his politics. Because Marx holds that material reality, that is, the economic organization of a society, structures the class relations in that society, it holds that that these different classes will see the world differently. Marx’s critical leverage, therefore, is not solely based on his ability to take up an objectivating, critical distance from the capitalist arrangements in which he theorized. Rather, he appeals to the interested perspective of

the proletariat in order to see past the naturalized, socially dominant, and ideologically ensconced perspective of the capitalist. Whereas the capitalist understands his society's economic and social relations, and the differences in material well-being that these relations imply, to be the natural outgrowth of reasonably agreed upon processes of exchange, the proletariat is able to see things quite differently. By invoking this interested perspective, Marx is able to "uncover the process by which surplus value is produced and appropriated by the capitalist, and the means," therefore, "by which the worker is systematically disadvantaged."

Hartsock finds Marx's analysis suggestive, but she seeks to augment it by turning her attention to a specific, but fundamental kind of labor to which Marx pays insufficient attention: women's labor. Thus, in her original formulation of feminist standpoint theory, she argued "that like the lives of proletarians according to Marxian theory, women's lives make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy, a vantage point which can ground a powerful critique of the phallogentric institutions and ideology which constitute the capitalist form of patriarchy." Such a vantage point, she argued, could provide the basis for "a specifically feminist historical materialism" by turning its attention to "the sexual division of labor." That division provides a standpoint that takes into account, more fully than male-centered Marxian theory, the kinds of labor usually performed by women and, in doing so, the full range of human laboring activity.²⁶⁵

As Haraway points out, theorists such as Iris Young had, at about the same time that "The Feminist Standpoint Theory" appeared, theorized a "gender division of labor," which would attend to those kinds of labor – "bearing and rearing of children, caring for

²⁶⁵ Nancy Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint," from *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited and Other Essays* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 107.

the sick, cooking, housework, and sex-work like prostitution” – excluded by a merely Marxist analysis. In doing so, Young sought to bring these “gender and women’s specific situations to the center of historical materialist analysis.”²⁶⁶ Hartsock agrees with the general thrust of Young’s argument, but she phrases her analysis in terms of “the sexual division of labor,” rather than the gender division, “in order to emphasize the bodily dimensions of women’s activity.”²⁶⁷ Hartsock, in fact, concludes that the strategic use of the term “sex” rather than “gender” has contributed to the confusion, mentioned above, that “standpoint” somehow refers to a biological essentialism. Hartsock notes that she decided on the term “sex” so as to underline the interrelationship, indeed, the inseparability, of “of nature and nurture, or biology and culture.” Like the Marx of the *1844 Manuscripts*, Hartsock insists “we are part of nature and social at the same time.” From this Marxist perspective, Hartsock argues, “Nature ... appears as a form of human work, since we duplicate ourselves actively, in reality, and come to contemplate the selves we have created in a world of our own making.”²⁶⁸ As this chapter unfolds we will explore how this emphasis on “bodily dimensions of women’s activity” suggests one place where the logic of bodily inscription developed within a Nietzschean lineage comes into confluence with more immediately Marxist forms of social theorizing, productively augmenting Marx’s insights into the physiological-affective dimensions of oppression while challenging totalizing readings of Marx’s thought. Hartsock’s attentiveness to the corporeal dimension of labor, which she initially develops in a Marxist lineage, foreshadows both Butler’s effort to demonstrate how bodies *matter* within the discourses

²⁶⁶ Dona Haraway, “‘Gender’ for a Marxist Dictionary,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 139.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

²⁶⁸ Hartsock, “Revisited,” 324.

by which they are constituted and Haraway's interest in how the informational economies that we increasingly inhabit demand a *semiomaterial* critique.

Women, Hartsock observes, must, like men, "sell their labor power and produce both commodities and surplus value." Unlike men, however, "women's lives are institutionally defined by their production of use-values in the home."²⁶⁹ Marx and Engels, Hartsock suggests, are unable to conceptualize how the specificities of this particular kind of labor produce the particular, concrete perspective of women in capitalist society. For both men and women, labor is a sensuous activity, involving "a unification of mind and body."²⁷⁰ The content of that unification, however, is significantly different: women do more work than men, women devote most of their time to the production of use-values rather than commodities, and women get stuck doing the "repetitious cleaning" involved in housework.²⁷¹ Hartsock claims that these realities of women's labor put women in nearly constant contact with "the world of use – in concrete, many-qualified, changing material processes – ...". Therefore,

if life itself consists of sensuous activity, the vantage point available to women on the basis of their contribution to subsistence represents an intensification and deepening of the materialist worldview and consciousness available to the producers of commodities in capitalism, an intensification of class consciousness.²⁷²

Though biological difference is a fundamental part of Hartsock's original picture of a woman's standpoint, it is never independent from the mediation of that difference through particular forms of social labor. Women's labor extends beyond her unique role in production and maintenance of daily material life: "Women also produce/reproduce

²⁶⁹ Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint," 113.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² *Ibid.*

men (and other women) on both a daily and long term basis.”²⁷³ Women’s conventional role in raising children grant them a particularly valuable moral perspective: “Women as mothers even more than as workers, are institutionally involved in processes of change and growth, and more than workers, must understand the importance of avoiding excessive control in order to help others grow.”²⁷⁴ Hartsock, echoing Jane Flax and Nancy Chodorow’s utilization of object relations theory, suggests that the female experience of childbirth and child rearing makes “it impossible to maintain rigid separation from the object world.”²⁷⁵ Empathy is likely to be part of a women’s sense of self,²⁷⁶ men, on the other hand, experience the world in ways that lead them to become more individuated.

Despite the value of these alternative perspectives, however, they risk reinforcing women’s “situatedness” in the patterns of domination that feminists seek to transform. Weeks, for example, worries that “broadening” the concept of labor in this way robs the category of its specificity and thus conflates “labor” with “activity.” Labor, as Haraway, Quinby, and Diamond have charged, becomes understood as “whatever we do.”²⁷⁷ The very specificity that is meant to empower standpoint theory, in other words, slides towards a conservative ontology that threatens to reinscribe the sites of women’s oppression that it had sought, in the fulfillment of its revolutionary desire, to transcend. Weeks argues that it is therefore important to refocus our understanding of labor from

²⁷³ Ibid., 115

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 116.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 117.

²⁷⁷ Weeks, 297.

merely being the particular forms of production and reproduction in which women engage to being a “value-creating activity.”²⁷⁸

Weeks argues that thinking of labor in these terms avoids reifying women’s activity as something that needs to be described as a sociological fact. In drawing our attention to the value of women’s activities, conceptualizing labor as “value creating activity” foregrounds “the question of how or if these are or should be valued in society.” Furthermore, by linking “value” to creative acts, such a conceptualization “serves to affirm our abilities to (re)construct the world, to focus our attention on the ways in which these abilities and activities are limited or restrained, and to encourage struggle over which constituting activities are valued in society.”²⁷⁹ Weeks brings Marx’s notion of labor into proximity with Nietzsche’s notion of the will to power to capture the aesthetic-affective content of labor (and thus the desire that is worked out in labor),²⁸⁰ but her ultimate goal is to suggest the political potential of this aestheticism.

As it is turned towards Marxism, however, this Nietzschean inspired aestheticism encounters a limit. As William Adams has pointed out, construing labor as an activity capable of both reproducing the relations of production and as an aesthetic activity capable of providing a post-religious basis for human “meaning” marks a difficult paradox in Marx’s thought. Positively, imagining labor in this dual capacity gives us some standard for imagining a world in which we were no longer alienated from our labor. If, as Marx argues, “the development of production” within capitalism “distort[s] the worker into a fragment of a man” and “degrade[s] him to the level of an appendage of

²⁷⁸ Weeks, 297.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ On the assumed relationship between “aesthetics” and “desire,” see George Kateb’s description of aesthetically motivated political action as “cravings,” in George Kateb, “Aestheticism and Morality: Their Cooperation and Hostility,” *Political Theory* 28 (2000), 12.

a machine,” then the “process of artistic production” in which the artist enjoys complete creative control over his work and his product offers an inviting model of “wholeness and unity”²⁸¹ that, we might add, sustains the openness of that “wholeness and unity.”

Labour, understood as a creative activity, always promises to challenge the reified social totality in which it occurs. Unfortunately, this appeal to an aesthetic model, importantly operative in the work of the young Marx, cannot stand what the more mature Marx recognizes as the realities of the division of labor in complex modern societies. The alienation of man from his labor, Marx comes to realize, is not merely the result of the form that labor takes under capitalism. More precisely, alienation results from the *kind* of labor necessary for industrial production, a form of production that Marx assumes will continue to hold sway in post-capitalist societies. Rather than appeal to “the intrinsic nature of labor,” the mature Marx shifts to a hope for an escape from labor and the “maximization ... of leisure.” The more mature Marx’s assessment may be more sober, but it is not necessarily a reassuring development for the theorization of Marxist practice. As Adams points out, “One can imagine a society of relative equality and planned economic development that nonetheless rests on alienated labor.” Thus the paradox: the “aesthetic sensibility that initially shapes and energizes his critique of capitalism and alienated labor, it is also that sensibility in the end that poses serious questions about this conception of a revolutionary alternative.” Alternatively, one can imagine the maximization of leisure time as a principle of social organization falling back into the proprietorial, atomizing logic against which Marxism militates. The affective and aesthetic dimensions of our lives, then, continue to mark a pressing problem for a

²⁸¹ Adams, “Aesthetics: Liberating the Senses,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 270.

transformative leftist thinking, seeming to threaten nothing beyond the Weberian alternatives of “Specialists without spirit; sensualists without heart.”²⁸²

Thus, it is not immediately clear how Weeks’ effort to articulate a necessary aesthetic dimension of a maturing standpoint theory suggests *emancipatory political activity*. We need to more clearly demonstrate how this aesthetic orientation is made manifest, at a theoretical level, as political activity. With this in mind, we seek to further trace an alternative, “critical desire” as it emerges in the work of Judith Butler. The specific notion of an aesthetic politics, and the draw towards the affective that such a politics summarizes, articulated by this alternative notion of desire is central to a critical theory’s effort to reimagine our individual and collective identities.

VII. From Standpoint to Performativity: Butler’s Postmodern Agency

By looking at how the problematic of desire, inchoately at work in Nietzsche’s texts but more explicitly thematized by Foucault, Deleuze, and Irigaray, has been construed by Butler, we can clarify the ways in which our emerging notion of “critical desire” works to inform a particular orientation towards the political.

We might foreground Butler’s place within a Nietzschean lineage by quickly rehearsing Michel Foucault’s notion of a “limit attitude.” According to Foucault, we always find ourselves enmeshed in overlapping and tangled relationships that mark out differentials of power that reach into our bodies and that constrain some voices while amplifying others, “subjectifying” us in the interstices, or gaps, of these overlapping limits. Foucault, in suggesting how the status of the subject is conferred within specific limits of a social world, offers a more sophisticated account of political agency imagined

²⁸² Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 182.

as an ongoing task that seeks “to promote new forms of subjectivity through” an always problematic “refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.” As Paul Rabinow puts it, Foucault invokes a politics of transfiguration, of “work done at the limits of ourselves,” that refuses “to settle for the affirmation or the empty dream of freedom.”²⁸³ That work, according to Rabinow, “tests the limits of society, and of the self” and seeks to determine “what it is desirable and possible to change.”²⁸⁴

Butler helps clarify the ways in which Foucault’s Nietzschean inspired “limit attitude” focuses the hopes of liberatory practice on the body. In doing so, she suggests how feminists might address the particularity of their circumstances, of their constructed position within society, in ways that guard against essentializing and dehistoricizing the body and its desires as a biological given.²⁸⁵ In *Bodies That Matter*, she responds to her critics’ claims that she conceives of the material body as the “mere effect of discourse”²⁸⁶ and to those who over enthusiastically took her path breaking *Gender Trouble* as a call to turn gender into an improvisational free-play. Her response, she hopes, might clarify how she understands the relationship between “sex” and “gender” and how that

²⁸³ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” as quoted in Paul Rabinow, “Introduction: The History of Systems of Thought,” in *Michel Foucault, Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1977), xxxii – xxxiii.

⁶⁷ Rabinow, xxxiii.

²⁸⁵ For specific treatments of Foucault’s intersections with feminist thinking, see Jana Sawicki, “Foucault and Feminism: Toward a Politics of Difference,” in *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory*, edited by Mary Lyndon Shanley and Carole Pateman (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State Press, 1991), 217 – 31. Lois McNay, *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self* (Boston: Northwestern University Press, 1992). Ladelle McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999.

²⁸⁶ Kathleen Jones, for example, argues that Butler’s efforts to denaturalize the “maternal body” merely represent the latest attempt to escape the material limits in which women’s efforts for emancipation are necessarily inscribed by “reducing the female body to a (mere) effect of discourse.” Butler’s “denial that this body has any material reality to is apart from specific, endlessly malleable, cultural readings of it,” Jones contends, reflects the wishful “refusal to accept the limitations and implications, for all of us, of our” natality and mortality.

understanding affects a necessarily complex and less celebratory notion of political resistance and freedom.

Gender Trouble was originally written against the backdrop of a more or less accepted dichotomy within and about feminist thought. Gayle Rubin argues that every society is marked by sex/gender system, “a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner ...”²⁸⁷ Thus gender can be separated off from sex, marking instead a “socially imposed division of the sexes” that transforms “males” and “females” into “men” and “women” and/or “husbands” and “wives” and enforces heterosexual behavior. This notion of gender requires the repression of feminine characteristics in men and masculine characteristics in women.

Many were to read Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* as a subversive extension of this logic. That book, no doubt, “calls into question the need for a stable ‘female’ identity, and explores the radical potential of a critique of categories of identity.” Such a critique, for Butler, gains its force in uncovering the ways in which “gender identities acquire what stability and coherence that they have in the context of the ‘heterosexual matrix.’”²⁸⁸ By recognizing the problematic but unproblematicized authoritative force of this matrix, Butler argues, we can recognize its nonessential and thus contestable status. The body that this matrix posits as “normal” cannot serve as foundational, naturalized site for our self-understandings; it too, like the “gender” differentiations that depend upon it, merely reflects a repetition of discursive formations whose ultimate authority is thus questionable. Women, for example, might be

²⁸⁷ Gayle Rubin, “The traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” 111.

²⁸⁸ From the forward to “Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler,” *Radical Philosophy* (67, Summer 1994), 32.

able to reimagine themselves differently than always already being within the “trope of the maternal body.” In denaturalizing the heterosexist basis for the “maternal body,” that body can “no longer be understood as the hidden ground” for the totality of women’s significations or as “the tacit cause of all culture.” Rather, that body can be “understood as an effect or consequence of a system of sexuality in which the female body is required to assume maternity as essence of itself and as the law of its desire.” In the context of Butler’s narrative, this insight seems to demand a certain attitude of resistance by those who are most repressed by prevailing forms of normativity. Theatrical acts in general, and drag in particular, for example, are held out as exemplars of how gays and lesbians might craft an affirmative resistance to a dominant heterosexism.

Rather than celebrate mere discourse, Butler works to show how language and the corporeal are always already intertwined and that, as a consequence, the bodies that we presume are “written.” In doing so, she invokes a *logic of bodily inscription* that points to the corporeal and material surface where the “subject” and the “social” are written together, marking out the movement of desire in relationship to a series of constraints, nodes and trajectories inscribed on the body. As we have seen, Elizabeth Grosz, writing specifically about Nietzsche and Deleuze, felicitously summarizes this logic in terms of a thought experiment. She asks us to “think of subjectivity as a flat surface,” with the mind being the inside of this plane and the body being the outside. Without denying how instinctual, biological desire is etched on the inside of this plane, this model allows us to imagine the outside plane being marked by “the tracing of pedagogical, juridical, medical and economic imperatives, laws and practices,” producing a social subject “capable of

labour, of production, and of manipulation."²⁸⁹ These engravings on the outside surface of Grosz's heuristic construct help us to constellate Nietzsche's "mnemotechnics," Foucault's "discursive practices," Butler's "bodies that matter," and Haraway's "semiomaterialism."

Butler will demonstrate that even the seemingly incontestability of "biological processes" are themselves always already mediated by discursive practices that contour our particular experience of ourselves as desiring beings, but it seems that she still cherishes within her own thinking something of desire's tropical and affective resonance. Her description of subject-formation doesn't come across as being a naively neutral exercise; rather, she, like both Nietzsche and Foucault, seems to valorize the turning toward the limit(s) that allows us to recognize, at least partially, the production of our subjectivity.²⁹⁰ Furthermore, Butler has been specific that just such a turning was part of *Gender Trouble's* logic of production. The valorization of this "turning" within our embodied mentations, and the ethos of interrogation, contestation, and overcoming that it underwrites, is not merely a descriptive claim; it is also at the heart of Butler's normative coherence. "Desire," it might be suggested, portrayed as a want that draws the subject onward toward something it might become, summarizes inevitable moments of encounter with the inscriptive limits of these "pedagogical, juridical, medical, and economic imperatives, laws and practices."

²⁸⁹ Elizabeth Grosz, "Nietzsche and the Stomach for Knowledge," 49. Elsewhere, she defines the "body" as "a concrete, material, animate organization of flesh, organs, nerves, and skeletal structure, which are given a unity, cohesiveness, and form through the psychical and social inscription of the body's surface." "Bodies-Cities," in *Space, Time, Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 104.

²⁹⁰ "The writing of this denaturalization was not done simply out of a desire to play with language or prescribe theatrical antics in the place of 'real' politics, as some critics have conjectured (as if theatre and politics are always distinct). It was done from a desire to live, to make life possible, and to rethink the possible as such." Judith Butler, "Preface 1999," to *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), xx.

Butler's invocation of a logic of inscription, and the "weak" ontology²⁹¹ of desire to which it productively and pleasurably commits her, underscores her normative and political worry that positing an individual's "sex" as a biologically irreducible category unproblematically outside of discourse ignores the ways in which the contours of "sex" itself are already caught up in and given its morphological dimensions by the performative iteration of particular social practices. Butler gleans the notion of the "performative" from her reading of Derrida's (debate with Serle about the proper reading of J. L. Austin's) analysis of speech acts.²⁹² Performativity, it should be stressed, cannot be reduced to a mere "performance" that imagines a fully formed subject who acts on, or presents itself within, an external field. The notion of performance, for example, would fit nicely into a schema in which a normalized sexual body could present itself *as* a gender that one "donned" for the day and then "restored ... to its place at night."²⁹³ Performativity, on the other hand, suggests that the very sense of self that we carry with us is an *ongoing process* of naming our activities and ourselves. That process, however, is not some abstracted, merely ideational, construction that could casually be taken on and off. Articulated in the context of Nietzschean notions of reading and writing as mnemotechnical inscription, that iterative naming not only offers a denotative meaning for its referent, it is in fact the embodied enactment of that referent. In Butler's

²⁹¹ For a discussion of the use and transformation of the notion of "ontology" in contemporary political theory and for his formulation of "weak ontology," see Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3–12. For his specific treatment of Butler, see chapter 4, 75–105.

²⁹² See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, J. L. Austin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* Translated by Alan Bass, Samuel Weber, and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988). For the proximity of Nietzsche's thought to certain strands of analytic thought, see Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965).

²⁹³ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, x.

terms, it is how something matters, how it comes to matter. By thinking in terms of performativity, as an inscribed, bodily practice, we can recognize that embodied meaning can only have coherence to the degree that it cites an iterable utterance or a previously formulated code.²⁹⁴

To gain some sense of the inculcative effectiveness of this normativity, think of how the initial utterance “it’s a boy” begins to mark a constantly repeated process that conditions the seemingly uncontested notion of what “boyhood” is all about. Within the consensus of a given society, the cumulative force of these iterations can be overwhelming, masking the fact that they are not the only possibilities made available by our biology, and subtly initiating a symbolic chain that situates our “sex” within the gendered economy of heterosexuality. Too easily, “he’s a boy,” as an innocent claim about “his” sexuality, means that “he’s a boy” who “plays army, acts aggressively, talks the most in class, controls women, fights wars, etc.” The performative nature of these reiterations marks an ongoing, though not necessarily conscious, attempt to mark the acceptable boundaries of our sexed bodies as a foundational space, a space that precedes discourse and which thus excludes alternative versions of our “sex” which might preemptively challenge this ongoing engendering of our self-understandings. In recognizing that our bodies are an ongoing construction, Butler recognizes that identities are always in the process of being transformed and that we have some say in their transformation. Butlerian performativity, working between the two poles of an excessive celebration of a voluntarist free will and a totally determinative structuralism, therefore, offers us a way of responding to those who would dismiss claims about socialization by invoking the body as the incontestable site of the normal.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 232 – 35.

Imagined in terms of performativity, as that which is made possible by iteration, we come to know our embodied subjectivity as it emerges within existing and constraining structures. It marks the difficult space in which Butler's deconstructive, genealogical approach must make use of the "painful resources" that are available to us in our efforts to interrogate and to perhaps change who we are. These resources are painful because they are always already embedded in a contextual chain – which could imaginably include socio-cultural, economic, linguistic-communicative, and existential constraints – that remain binding to the degree that they sustain an already operative force of repetition inscribed at the level of bodily habit. The structure of any code's performative imposition, however, also suggests a liberatory potential – because our attempts to (re)figure ourselves are based on repetition and not on some unalterable law of the self, there are ways of modifying these repetitions, of tweaking those "ontological effects" in which we find ourselves always already moving but in whose construction we always participate. Performativity does not deprive women of agency, as some critics have complained. Rather, in the space between the model, the code, the utterance, or the structure of the utterance and its repetition, a temporal slippage allows for a place apart – for the new and the unforeseen. That it "is a repeated process, an iterable process," Butler argues, "is precisely the condition of agency within discourse."²⁹⁵

Importantly, Butler not only uses these conceptual resources to guard against the "puritanisms" that she finds lurking in the patriarchal politics that she opposes, but also in the gay, lesbian, and feminist politics that she endorses. She tries to put into practice a tool for troubling entrenched patterns of power that simultaneously calls into question the dangers of its own identity. A feminism that takes up an analysis of how the self-

²⁹⁵ Butler, in Benhabib, et al., *Feminist Contentions* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 135.

understandings available to women are produced by their “emplacement” within this larger discursive field might give rise to a radically nominalist politics that allows a critical theory, as it aspires towards a more just political future, to speak of a space that reopens that future, even as “it” creates that future.²⁹⁶

VIII. Donna Haraway: Post-subjective Nominalism as Critical Theory

“All I am really asking for is permanent passion and irony, where passion is as important as irony.”²⁹⁷

Butler’s story of how our subjectivities are formed is iterated within a different idiom by the similar picture of subject formation drawn by Donna Haraway. Haraway, like Butler, consciously utilizes a literal and tropical notion of desire as an explanatory mechanism that underwrites our abilities to produce and reproduce our self-understandings. Like Nietzsche, Foucault, Deleuze, Irigaray and Butler, she makes use of desire not to instantiate or naturalize “it,” but in order to imagine strategies for refiguring “it.” Haraway elaborates how logics of inscription are manifested by dynamically interrelated shifts in our technological, scientific and economic practices.

Haraway opens up some of the critical potential of Weeks’ augmentation of standpoint theory with Nietzschean resources. Though Haraway has claimed that

²⁹⁶ Foucault defines emplacement as “the relations of proximity between points or elements.” “Different Spaces,” in *The Essential Works of Foucault: 1954-1984*, Vol. 2, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 176. Donna Haraway uses the term nominalism in the sense that it is used here. See “Ecce Homo, Ain’t (Ar’n’t) I a Woman, and Inappropriate/d Others: The Human in a Post-Humanist Landscape,” in *Feminist Theorize the Political*, Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 88. For a more general account of Haraway’s deployment of the forms of analyses sketched out in this chapter, see [Modest Witness@Second Millenium. Female Man Meets OncoMouse](#) (New York: Routledge, 1997), 125-30.

²⁹⁷ Haraway, *How Like a Leaf* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 172.

Whitehead and Heidegger have had greater influence on her thinking than the French post-modernists, and though she seems unaware of the Nietzschean motifs operative in her thinking, her vocabulary and sensibility resonate with many of the major themes and conclusions that we have seen populating post-Nietzschean thinking. Dan Conway, for example, sees Haraway's work complicating "the dream of foundational innocence" that motivates (at least Sandra Harding's version of) stand-point theory. Conway argues that Haraway's "myth of the cyborg" embodies a "purely prospective agency" for whom "the past – along with the lure of innocence, origin and redemption – is irretrievably lost."²⁹⁸ Haraway works to put the situated perspectives excavated by stand-point theory into motion, troubling the certainty and comfort of these perspectives, installing within them a reflexive, critical *attitude*.

An important thematic confluence between Haraway's work and Nietzschean thinking is her description of subject formation in terms of a logic of a bodily inscription (or in terms of what Foucault came to refer to as "discursive practices"), and thus always in terms of attitudes, assumptions and practices of reading and writing. Haraway, like Nietzsche, Foucault, and Butler, argues that we are always already within narrative structures: "Understanding the world is about living inside of stories. There's no place to be in the world outside of stories."²⁹⁹ These are more than stories that we merely tell ourselves, however. Rather, we are written by the integration of our body into

²⁹⁸ Though Nietzsche and Haraway's rhetoric can both sometimes devolve into this pure prospectivity, I think the more useful similarity in their work is reflected in how Haraway's cyborg offers a tactical orientation to the imbricated spheres of the political-historical and the ontological. Haraway's radical nominalism is driven, it seems, by a demand to get our bearings by locating the historically specific contours of our subjectification. Those contours always emerge in historical-practical contexts that mark the contiguous space out of which any self-understanding necessarily emerges. Dan Conway, "Das Weib an Sich: The Slave Revolt in Epistemology," in *Nietzsche, Feminism, and Political Theory*, ed. by Paul Patton (St. Leonards, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1993), 126.

²⁹⁹ Haraway, *How Like a Leaf*, 107.

technological apparatus, systems of production, and relationships of domination and exchange. We are, to use her now well known formulation, cyborgs, “written” by the codes, technologies, machines, structures and operations of power that we inhabit. We take our bearings from this “weak” ontological premise: that we cyborgs are a writing, a construction. “Writing is preeminently the technology of cyborgs, etched surfaces of the late twentieth century.”

But, much as Butler understands our subject formation as an ongoing performative engagement with the coded limits of our subjectivity, allowing for agency as “the desire for desire” that turns the thinker towards those limits, Haraway’s notion of cyborg politics also asserts a tactile resistance to the situated spaces in which we find ourselves encoded. As with the notion of the “limit attitude” and “performativity,” the normative orientation of a cyborg politics gains impetus from its description of the world. Recognizing its own impure origins, a cyborg politics militates against the finalizing authority of all totalizing political projects; thus “Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism.”

Haraway challenges us to rethink the notion of identity through the figure of the cyborg, an “epistemological and political position” within the frame “set by the extent and importance of rearrangements in world-wide relations tied to science and technology.” If Nietzsche, Foucault, and Butler have helped us to reevaluate ourselves in terms of social inscriptions, in terms of mnemotechnical practices of reading and writing, then Haraway helps us recognize the ways in which those practices are undergoing a radical transformation through “a movement from an organic, industrial society to a

polymorphous, information system³⁰⁰ The intellectual resources useful for recognizing and contesting our subjectification within “the comfortable old hierarchical dominations” are no longer applicable “to the scary new networks” of “the informatics of domination.”³⁰¹ We live in a time when advances in communications technologies and biotechnologies are, quite often in concert, revolutionizing the material basis of our self-understandings by informationalizing that very basis, turning even our laboring bodies into data that can be coded, and then sold, integrated in circuits of commodity exchange and social control. Both modern communications and biological technological spheres are related “by a common move – *the translation of the world into a problem of coding*, ... in which all resistance to instrumental control disappears and all heterogeneity can be submitted to disassembly, reassembly, investment and exchange.”³⁰² Haraway thus turns the genealogical/aesthetic logic of inscription that can be traced from Nietzsche through Foucault to Butler towards the rapidly transforming lifeworld of informational capitalism in the service of her own brand of socialist-feminist anti-homophobic technoscience. In Haraway, one can see how Nietzschean modes of thought can be utilized by a thinking that is also Marxian.

Though one of the accomplishments of a critical desire articulated in the thinking of Nietzsche, Foucault, Butler, and Haraway is a greater appreciation of the role played by the interplay of all of our senses in our political self-understandings, Haraway reminds us that this tradition does not devalue a continued engagement with the optical and with optical metaphors. Certainly, she admits, given the ways that traditional understandings

³⁰⁰ Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 161.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid., 164.

of vision are mapped onto by patriarchal ideologies, “it is no surprise that a lot of feminist work emphasizes different tropic systems, especially the oral, the aural, and the tactile.” Such emphases, however, should not themselves become dogmatic, forbidding us from engaging with and reimagining our habits of *seeing*. Again, such a simple reversal would reinscribe the structure of power, merely putting another sense unproblematically on top. Haraway instead insists on impurity, rather than purity, in imagining the capabilities and ethics of vision. By “insisting metaphorically on the particularity and embodiment of all vision,” we will be able “to construct a usable, but not innocent, doctrine of objectivity.”³⁰³ By insisting on this situatedness of vision, we are able to rethink vision in ways that guard against the hierarchical implications of traditional philosophical theories of vision (theories that even Nietzsche was unable to consistently abdicate); by insisting on its embodiedness, we guard against (any) vision being granted an unproblematic primacy in our self-understandings.

Haraway offers the notion of “diffraction” as a different way organizing our seeing, and thus, importantly, our reading. “Diffraction,” as a theme within the history of the study of optics, offers us an alternative to philosophically predominant metaphors of reflection and reflexivity. Diffraction refers to

... when light passes through slits, the light rays that pass through are broken up. And if you have a screen at one end to register what happens, what you get is a record of the passage of the light rays onto the screen. This “record” shows the history of their passage through the slits. So what you get is not a reflection; it’s the record of the passage.³⁰⁴

³⁰³ Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” in *Cyborgs*, 189.

³⁰⁴ Haraway, *How Like A Leaf*, 103.

For Haraway, diffraction is “not about identity as taxonomy, but it’s about registering process on the recording screen.” Thus, much like genealogy, diffraction implores us to think historically in a way that captures disjunctures, successions, and morphings within an “identity’s” lineage.

This link between the way the world is, the way she reads it, and a certain kind of political attitude is iterated by Haraway’s concern with preserving a connection between critical social theory and *desire*. This connection allows Haraway the bearings necessary for gaining a sense of her epistemic position in a late capitalist world. At a critical level, Haraway, by demonstrating the ways in which scientific practices hook up with the operative practices of desire in society at large – in the circuits of commodity exchange, in the production processes of the academy and the technological community – elicits a self-consciousness about the production of knowledge and, as her analysis of “informationalization” suggests, of ourselves. In doing so, Haraway has endeavored to trouble our faith in the integrity of an internally validated, purportedly neutral scientific practice. Beyond this tactical-critical function, however, her recourse to the image of desire serves an affirmative function. It gives her readers some sense of why they should be (or perhaps why they already are) motivated to live in the critical-practical fashion that she endorses. Desire is at the heart of how she reads the social and scientific world, but it also informs why she writes and teaches about it. The desire that she voices is in some sense both an historical-political, ontological description *and* a valorized normative orientation. Haraway wants to link the power provided by her new semiotic category of diffraction to a political practice impelled by an ironizing desire. Diffraction, as one set of lens onto the ontological, seems to carry with it the impetus for a certain attitude

toward the political. It is, to again follow White's useful spectrum, complicit with a "weak ontology" that provides an image "about making a difference in the world as opposed to just being endlessly self-reflective."³⁰⁵ In threading the thematic of desire throughout her narratives, Haraway implicates her ethno-scientific studies of how the intersecting logics of science, patriarchy, and capital produce particular, contestable, narratives of the "truth" by undertaking what Foucault called a "critical ontology of ourselves." We might think, for example, of how her "diffractions" of the stories of primate sexuality and their role in sustaining certain understandings of human nature help to trouble reified limits of our self-understandings.

Beyond this descriptive work, Haraway, in her particular form of expression and in terms of where she focuses her thinking, helps to accomplish what Foucault was after in suggesting that recent liberation movements "need an ethics, but they cannot find any other ethics than an ethics founded on scientific knowledge of what the self is, what desire is, what the unconscious is, and so on."³⁰⁶ Foucault's comment suggests that the possible forms of human relationships that are encoded within "an ethics founded on scientific knowledge" occlude alternative conceptualizations of "what the self is, what desire is, what the unconscious is." As we have seen above, a Nietzschean rereading might be deployed in developing pragmatic political analyses of ourselves. Haraway follows this pragmatics, sketched out by Foucault and Butler; her work sketches out figures of agency that turn desire towards the limits traced by socially inscribed contours of desire, putting desire (figured tropically within thinking) into the service of an ongoing

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 104 – 105.

³⁰⁶ Foucault, Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of a Work in Progress," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 231.

“critique of the present.” She also, however, advances their projects, embedding their general theoretical premises in the emerging material realities of late modern capitalism. Haraway augments the vocabulary of “critical desire,” applying it within new foci and in response to the increasing role played by technoscience in the formation of our self-understandings. Such an approach hooks into the desire that undergirds the social reality that we want to transform, turning it towards an ongoing form of political commitment that interrogates the specific limits that configure that reality. In her “argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction,”³⁰⁷ Haraway seeks to clarify the place of desire within a critical politics that is a “constant checking.”

She speaks of “subtle understanding of emerging pleasures, experiences, and powers with serious potential for changing the rules of the game.”³⁰⁸ In order to work at the constructed epistemic position from which it might gain some sense of the social totality against which it turns, it departs “From the point of view of pleasure in” the “potent and taboo fusions, made inevitable by the social relations of science and technology. . . .” Again, like Nietzsche, Haraway does not shy away in disgust with what’s happening out there; rather, she critically embraces the impurity of the standpoints that we occupy in order to suggest an imaginative logic, or attitude, towards the world that we are crafting. Only on the basis of such a departure, and in terms of such an ethos, can we imagine something akin to her notion of a “feminist science.”³⁰⁹ In response to the Foucauldian call for a language of desire that escapes an ethic encoded in and by modern science, Haraway suggests that reimagined forms of desire would/will/have

³⁰⁷ Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” 150.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 174.

begun to infiltrate the entirety of our social-cognitive practices. The reimagination of desire engenders the reimagination of Foucault's modern science. This form of "objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment, and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibilities."³¹⁰ "The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision."³¹¹ In refiguring desire, and the logic of vision that it underwrites, Haraway puts the situated perspectives excavated by stand-point theory into motion, installing in these perspectives a reflexive, temporal, critical orientation. In commenting on her essay, "Situated Knowledges," Haraway warns readers of too "flatly" reading "situatedness" as "place," of meaning "merely what your identifying marks are and literally where you are."³¹² Rather, she seeks, throughout her work, to articulate "the multiple modes of embedding that are both about place and space ..."

This reworked perspectivalty, and the differentiating desire in which Nietzsche, Foucault, Butler and Haraway articulate it, now encourages Hartsock to speak of multiple standpoints as the basis of "the theoretical conditions of possibility for creating alternatives."³¹³ Though Hartsock argues that we "need" theory "indebted to Marx" that eschews "postmodernism" in favor of "standpoint," her rearticulation of standpoint has come to have strong affinities with a particular lineage of Nietzschean thought and its effort to reimagine desire. I have merely tried to show how that lineage of thinking, as articulated by Foucault and Butler, and iterated, whether consciously or not, by Haraway,

³¹⁰ Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 190.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Haraway, *How Like A Leaf*, 71.

³¹³ Hartsock, 236.

has come to refashion standpoint in a language that, in its corporeality and perspectivalty, bears the stamp of Nietzsche's presence.³¹⁴

For many, the kinds of arguments offered by Butler and Haraway signal a disaster for leftist and feminist thought. Such responses, they point out, might actually reinforce the simultaneously invigorating and anesthetizing force of a commodified lifestyle, preventing those trapped within an unjust economic structure from recognizing the possibilities for more concrete and lasting forms of social justice. Feminist critics have argued that Butlerean poststructuralism deprives feminism of its agency. As many commentators have noted, it seems that just at the point when feminists have gained some sense of self, Butler's work wants to insist that the self is a dangerous fiction that needs to be avoided.

Because these contradictions press a denial of identity within a representational language that must be used to articulate that denial, they eventually lead to the equation of "women" or "woman" with non-identity. Fraser, for example, worries that despite its heuristic value, such an equation elides "the general political problem of how to construct cultures of solidarity that are not homogenizing and repressive."³¹⁵ Fraser accuses Butler's early theorizing, for example, as being incapable of theorizing political solidarity because it is derived from a flawed conception of "women's liberation as liberation *from*

³¹⁴ Though I am not primarily interested in tracing direct lines of intellectual influence, Hartsock makes clear the important role Haraway's work has had in reshaping her understanding of standpoint. She approvingly quotes Haraway (who is herself alluding to bell hooks' notion of "yearning") in describing this reformulation: "A standpoint is not an empiricist appeal to or by 'the oppressed' by a cognitive, psychological, and political tool for more adequate knowledge judged by the nonessentialist, historically contingent, situated standards of strong objectivity. Such a standpoint is the always fraught but necessary fruit of the practice of oppositional consciousness. A feminist standpoint is a practical technology rooted in yearning, not an abstract philosophical foundation." Haraway, *Modest_Witness*, in Hartsock, 236. See also Hartsock, 234. For an indication of the longstanding intellectual relationship between Hartsock and Haraway, see Haraway, *How Like a Leaf*, 36 – 37.

³¹⁵ Nancy Fraser, "False Antithesis: A Response to Seyla Benhabib and Judith Butler," in *Feminist Contentions*, 218.

identity ...”. For this Butler, identity is itself “inherently oppressive.”³¹⁶ Fraser accepts Butler’s claim that identity is always liable to deconstruction and dissolution, but she argues that Butler’s hyperbolic refusal of identity ignores the pragmatic-political reality of political identities, and that this valorization of non-identity should be modulated by the more sober, empirically accurate, and politically viable attitude that “generalizing claims about ‘women’ are inescapable but always subject to revision.; ...”³¹⁷

That is pretty close, in fact, to Butler’s more recent comments on the issue of collective identities such as feminism. Partly in response to the challenges posed by Fraser and others, partly in response to her own work on the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, she now endorses “universality” as a strategically necessary site of political contestability. She has come “to understand how the assertion of universality can be proleptic and performative, conjuring a reality that does not yet exist, and holding out the possibility for a convergence of cultural horizons that have not yet met.”³¹⁸ Something like “solidarity” is a necessary element of an insurgent politics – to create voting leverage, in order to articulate demands, to give to one’s aspirations the force that is necessary in the political arena. We have, however, become suspicious of how the call for solidarity can turn over into oppressive, even totalitarian, excess. Pragmatically, the dilemma for an insurgent democratic politics created by the necessity and danger of identity can only be solved by accepting the necessity of identity for political action while at the same time submitting that identity to an ongoing critique that suspiciously interrogates that identity’s emancipatory status. As Anna Marie Smith puts

³¹⁶ Ibid., 218 – 219.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 218.

³¹⁸ Butler, “Preface 1999,” xvii – xviii, see also *Feminist Contentions*, 130, where Butler refuses to deny “the usefulness or importance of the term ‘universal.’”

it in summarizing Spivak's position, "Universal claims, for all their fictitious character, can have tremendous pragmatic value; the task for radical democratic activists is to examine the ways in which they conceal antagonisms and foreclose alternative practices."³¹⁹

For Butler, the "universal" as a strategically useful category. For her, however, it is important to treat the category of the "universal" as an ongoing practice, defining it "as a future-oriented labor of cultural translation."³²⁰ She suggests that to think of the concept of the universal in temporal and historical terms reminds us that it is necessarily the case that "it may be that the universal is only partially articulated, and that it we do not yet know what form it will take."³²¹ With this in mind, Butler can invite the pragmatic use of universals, not only to sustain efficacious forms of political struggle, but also to provoke "a radical rearticulation of universality itself."³²² The contestation of the category of the universal gives rise to an awareness that "The task that cultural difference sets for us is the articulation of universality through a difficult labor of translation, one in which the terms made to stand for one another are transformed in the process, and where the movement of that unanticipated transformation establishes the universal as that which is yet to be achieved and which, in order to resist domestication, may never be fully or finally achievable."³²³

In adopting this more clearly pragmatic stance towards universality, Butler remains within the Nietzschean rethinking of subjectivity that she has sought to

³¹⁹ Anna Marie Smith, *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 161.

³²⁰ Butler, "Preface 1999), xviii.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Butler, *Feminist Contentions*, 130 - 131.

articulate. As we have tried to demonstrate, Nietzsche *does not* simply valorize freedom from identity. Rather, Nietzsche understands identity having a real and tangible existence that ensnares us in our truths. But he also recognizes identity as being fictive in the sense that all language, as man's identity bestowing activity par excellence, has no privileged relationship to *the* truth. As such, the truth of identity only gains its coherence in terms of arbitrarily assigned words whose meaning, a genealogical approach often reveals, can change in relationship to shifts in a society's distribution of political power. In other words, Nietzschean inspired approaches, like that articulated here by Butler, recognize the inevitability and importance of identity, but these approaches insist that identity is never natural; it is always, at the level of language and of embodied practice, politically contestable.

IX: Agonal Interventionists and the Alternatives of Feminist Interruption

Butler's pragmatic approach, and the post-standpoint vision that it is helping us articulate, dovetails nicely with efforts to reimagine collective politics in terms of difference rather than unity. Hartsock, for example, in calling for the development of a "theoretical basis for coalition" on the basis of the epistemologies contained as possibilities in the experiences of dominated groups," echoes Laclau and Mouffe's appeal to call an "ensemble" that recognizes "equivalencies" between the struggles of different women. Laclau and Mouffe's vision of radical democracy, like William Connolly's ethos of pluralization, extol the virtues of an agonal political attitude that vigilantly guards against the dangers of the necessary identities with which we pursue our political ends.

Chantal Mouffe's has figured this "radical and plural democracy" in the image of "citizenship as a form of political identity." Mouffe gives this notion of identity a quasi-foundational orientation. These values, liberty and equality for all, offer a "quasi-foundational" grounding because though they serve to orient identity, and though the rationale for their valuations would at the end of the day be held accountable before a Kantian court of judgment, their status is not uncovered as existing a priori, but rather emerge through practices of "articulation." In contrast to the notion of identity and solidarity imagined in terms "of an a priori, necessary link between subject positions," "articulation" describes the "constant efforts to establish between" these subject positions "historical, contingent, and variable links."³²⁴ A Nietzsche-like perspectivalism is thus turned towards the "impossible" construction of a "we" that both links different identities and maintains their differences, that both coheres and continually breaks open. This differencing, as a matter of description, is inevitable, because

though there is no necessary link between different subject positions, in the field of politics there are always discourses that try to provide an articulation from different standpoints. For that reason every subject position is constituted within an essentially unstable discursive structure since it is submitted to a wide variety of articulatory practices that constantly subvert it and transform it. This is why there is no subject position whose links with others is definitively assured and, therefore, no social identity that would permanently acquired.³²⁵

The "Citizen," as a figure of this grammar, does not derive its identity from either the absence of particular content (the neutral subject of liberalism) or the imposition of a particular content (the subject of communitarians), rather it should be thought of as "an

³²⁴ Chantal Mouffe, in *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 372.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 373.

articulating principle that affects the different subject positions of the social agent while allowing for a plurality of specific allegiances and for the respect of individual liberty.”³²⁶ As we will elaborate somewhat in the next chapter, such a grammar needs to be thought of in terms of a mnemotechnic practice, a way of cultivating a valorized mode of becoming.

A certain rethinking of the collective subject of a critical, transformative political theory, conceived now in terms of social plurality, gives rise to a rethinking of the notion of “the common good.” Between the poles of liberalism’s distance from and Civic Republicanism’s reification of the common good, “a radical democratic approach views the common good as a ‘vanishing point,’ something to which we must constantly refer when we are acting as citizens, but that can never be reached.”³²⁷ The ideal of the “common good” functions as a “social imaginary” which, like Jürgen Habermas’s “ideal speech situation,” is not meant as a precise blueprint for our society, but rather is meant as an organizing criterion towards which our politics should strive. The “common good” also functions, in a complementary fashion, as a way of rethinking the ethos, the attitude, the motivational structure, and/or the desire that underwrites our political and ethical interactions: it approximates a Wittgensteinian “‘grammar of conduct’ that coincides with the allegiance to the constitutive ethico-political principles of modern democracy: liberty and equality for all.”³²⁸ Though the reasons that we could give for the usefulness of those qualities would as a matter of preciseness necessarily gesture towards the universalism implied by “principles” and “for all,” the displacement that inheres in Mouffe’s notion of

³²⁶ Ibid., 378.

³²⁷ Ibid., 379.

³²⁸ Ibid.

the “common good” also informs our relationship to these ethico-political categories, opening them to an ongoing contestation.

Because those ethico-political principles themselves will remain politically contestable (they are, to use William Connolly’s phrase, “essentially contestable concepts”), it is necessarily the case that our theories of political community, in the act of focusing themselves, will depend upon the border that lies beyond their focus. The community is thus, in its very expression, an act that delimits a “we” from a “them,” and which thus diffracts the very notion of community itself. As Mouffe puts it, “once it is accepted that there cannot be a ‘we’ without a ‘them’ and that all forms of consensus are by necessity based on acts of exclusion, the question cannot be any more the creation of a fully inclusive community where antagonism, division, and conflict will have disappeared.”³²⁹

The privileged epistemic/discursive positions available to groups such as workers and women *as subordinated groups* can only be articulated after there are grounds for recognizing that subordination as a form of oppression. As Mouffe and Laclau put it, “The socialist demands should therefore be seen as a moment internal to the democratic revolution, and only intelligible on the basis of the equivalential logic of which the latter establishes.”³³⁰ Feminism, too, is such a moment.

In fact, it might be argued that rethinking socialism and feminism under democratic aims merely radicalizes Marx’s effort to accurately describe the world. Now, the meaning of “accuracy” here is quite interesting. It does not necessarily mean valid in any objective sense. Rather, it refers to that perspective that responds to the call of the

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (New York: Verso, 1998), 156.

impoverished and dehumanized “other” systematically created by capitalism. Marx’s objective knowledge could be said to be the objective knowledge of reality that reveals itself when one takes up an epistemic position subject to this ethical call. For this Marx, the factual and the normative-ethical cannot be separated. The subjective experience of wanting to overturn capitalism inheres in the unfolding logic of capital, which creates the conditions by which the proletariat becomes aware of himself as a class for-itself. Marx can merely explicate the conditions of this unfolding self-consciousness, preparing the proletariat to take advantage of his historical mission. Marx’s error, Laclau and Mouffe, will argue, is in overdrawing the degree to which “the primary fact of social division” could be ascribed to “the confrontation between the classes.” (151) From the very start, that model of social struggle has oversimplified the possibility for unity in an increasingly complex social field in which other “calls” will complicate the certainty of leftist thought. Thus, the hope for working class unity, “seen in perspective, is nothing other than the first act of a recognition – reluctant, it is true – of the plurality of the social, and the unsutured character of all political identity.” In recognizing the greater level of complexity of the political milieu in which critical thought intervenes, they suggest, it seems incumbent upon leftist thought to cultivate a flexibility capable of negotiating such a terrain.

The agonal tempo of engagement that emerges in the post-Nietzschean thought of William Connolly and Mouffe and Laclau, this contestatory vigilance, are necessary components of a healthy political theory – moments that seem presaged by the affectively charged movement of a transformative, critical desire. A theory of politics that only knows one tempo of desire, however, would seem hopelessly impoverished. Another

tempo must leaven our masculine charge to battle. The interruption of our desire, articulated above as the feminine/feminist interruption of my effort to craft a critical theory of politics, can be suggestive of that different tempo. As Irigaray's desiring encounter with Nietzsche demonstrates, the moment of intersubjective interruption sustained by our gendered differences allows us to begin to think the charge of our desire differently. Our critical desire can be, and sometimes needs to be, different from an always erect, contestatory vigilance. Stephen White's appropriation of Heideggerian "care"³³¹ and Romand Coles notion of a "receptive generosity"³³² based on a rethinking of *caritas* move in the direction of this alternative tempo, and this work cannot escape comparisons to their projects in this regard. But if this work remains true to its stated "purpose," to the "surprise" of encountering otherness that it dramatizes, then the particular path that it has taken to arrive at its conceptualization of politics makes all the difference. It has, the protagonist has come to realize, ensconced his proleptic fantasies in a different kind of game, turning it into a project of sustained interaction in which numerous partners come to recognize not only the limits of their own perceived identities, but also to cherish and cultivate the contributions of others to this ongoing process. "Our work," Irigaray calls it. Or, as she images "the problematic but compelling world of antiracist feminist multicultural studies of technoscience" towards the end of *Modest Witness*, our critical-practical vision, the attitude that informs our transformative politics, can be compared to "the children's game of 'cat's cradle.'" She is worth quoting at length here:

³³¹ Stephen K. White, *Political Theory and Postmodernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

³³² Romand Coles, *Rethinking Generosity: Critical Theory and the Politics of Caritas* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), particularly the concluding chapter, "Post-Secular Caritas, Coalition Politics, and Political Economy, 180 – 219.

Relying on relays from many hands and fingers, I try to make suggestive figures with the varying threads of science studies, antiracist feminist theory, and cultural studies. Cat's cradle is a game for nominalists like me who cannot *not* desire what we cannot possibly have. As soon as possession enters the game, the string figures freeze into a lying pattern. Cat's cradle is about patterns and knots; the game takes great skill and can result in some serious surprises. One person can build up a large repertoire of string figures on a simple pair of hands, but the cat's cradle figures can be passed back and forth on the hands of several players, who add new moves in the building of complex patterns. Cat's cradle invites a sense of collective work, of one person not being able to make all the patterns alone. One does not "win" at cat's cradle; the goal is more interesting and more open-ended than that. It is not always possible to repeat interesting patterns, and figuring out what happened to result in intriguing patterns is an embodied analytical skill. The game is played around the world and can have considerable cultural significance. Cat's cradle is both local and global, distributed and knotted together.³³³

The capacity to play this game, that "skill," entails becoming to know oneself and the world in which one lives in ways other than the breathless deconstructive intensity of Connolly and Laclau and Mouffe's appropriations of Nietzschean conceptions of "desire" for a democratic politics. Which isn't, of course, to say that we don't need that intensity. This very important play, however, has its other tempos. It's a game where we continue to build, bequeathing to others, to our heirs, an exemplary process, a project – ultimately, a world to be building.

³³³ Haraway, *Modest Witness*, 258.

Chapter 5: The “Critical Desire” of Liberal Meta-politics and the Heterotopian Space of the Feminist Other

I. It’s A Family Affair

In one of those passing niceties where thinkers rhetorically enact their thought, Habermas refers to his argument with Rawls as a “family quarrel.” In doing so, Habermas marks out in advance an allegiance between the two that covers their disagreements.³³⁴ This claim of family marks out an alliance, and, no doubt, this declaration of war is directed outwards. With this act of naming, Habermas takes up a tactical position against a wide array of “others” (religious fundamentalists, communitarians, post-modernists, fascists, pernicious capitalists, systems theorists, rational-choice theorists, orthodox marxists, etc.) whose objections to Rawls and Habermas’s shared commitment to liberal neutrality must be refuted, rebutted, discussed, qualified and so on. If Habermas objects to brother-in-arms³³⁵ Rawls, then, by the logic announced by “family,” it can only be to better the successful dissemination of their mutual theoretical-political projects. For in the end, according to their claims, the force of their thought on humanity’s political understanding depends on the strength of the reasons that they can give. In drawing a boundary around himself and Rawls, Habermas continues to insist that political theory, too, is *a* site of political practice, one arena where we fight the good fight.

Habermas insists on publicizing his argument with Rawls, and this move reminds us that such *internal* disputes are themselves constitutive of post-conventional,

³³⁴ Jürgen Habermas, “Reconciliation Through the Public Use of Reason,” trans. by Ciaran Cronin, in *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, edited by Ciaran Cronin and Pablo De Greiff (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 50.

³³⁵ “This conception of the self reflects aspects of male experience; the ‘relevant other’ in this theory is never the sister but always the brother.” Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 152.

consensually achieved identity structures. Whatever else is at stake in this insistence on a public disagreement, Habermas is, in entering into a (at least textually staged) form of intellectual exchange, enacting his ongoing effort to reimagine identity in a more mature way.³³⁶ Habermas thematizes his affinity with Rawls, that is, through a series of disagreements. Their identity as “family,” the argumentative form of this exchange reminds us, is constituted by the reflexive, self-critical, and essentially open-ended capacities enshrined in the structures of communicative action. In the end, Habermas hopes that this model of identity can successfully negotiate between the poles of a determinant ground and an indeterminate future, accounting for both the stability of our post-traditional lifeworld experience and the flexible, open-ended potential of a communicative rationality.

In specifying the terms of this kinship as a rather fundamental difference about the capacity of Rawls’ thought to incorporate difference, Habermas hopes to retrieve and to underline the continual, renewable openness entailed by an intersubjectively constituted identity. Habermas recognizes that both the fact and the valorization of this openness threatens the coherence of our self-understandings, as individuals and communities, and thus runs the risk of undoing the pragmatically necessary solidarity provided by identity structures like the family. “Of course,” he tells us, “the potential of unleashed communicative freedoms does contain an anarchistic core.” Nonetheless, at

³³⁶ I’m thinking of that operative lineage within Habermas’s thought, from Kant to Kohlberg, that seeks to thematize an ideal of humanity’s post-conventional maturity. For a dissenting view as to the status of this maturity, one that is consonant with the disruptive posture of this chapter, see Dreyfus and Rabinow, “What is Maturity?” in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. By David Couzens Hoy (New York: B. Blackwell, 1986).

the level of our meta-political identity, it is only in risking this fundamental openness that democratic institutions can ensure “equal liberties for all.”³³⁷

Habermas’s challenge to Rawls revolves around the degree to which his story about political legitimacy can sustain an intersubjective *openness*. He says that he will use the argumentative structure of their exchange as the basis for putting Rawls thought *into motion* in a way that is precluded by the grounding mechanisms that Rawls utilizes.³³⁸ In particular, Habermas points out that the original position closes off the intersubjective justification of society’s laws and guiding principles. The imagined autonomy of participants in the original position, Habermas points out, “does not fully unfold in the heart of the justly constituted society.” In fact, because the principles formulated in the original position are subsequently taken off the table for future questioning, “the more Rawls’s citizens themselves take on real flesh and blood, the more deeply they find themselves subject to principles and norms” ensconced in institutional settings beyond their recall.³³⁹ Finding “the results of the theory sedimented in the constitution,” such “citizens cannot conceive of the constitution as a project,” but only as a means of formulating and maintaining political stability.³⁴⁰ As such, Rawls’ conception of political liberalism threatens to sap democratic energies of their recursive force.

In anchoring his thinking in a pragmatics of language, Habermas can, more clearly than Rawls, thematize the close connection between intersubjectivity and a democracy’s *temporal legitimacy*. Such an anchorage accounts for the possibility of moral-practical and aesthetic-expressive learning, both describing this learning as

³³⁷ Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), xl.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

³³⁹ Habermas, “Reconciliation Through the Public Use of Reason,” 69.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 69–70.

something that already happens and as a possibility that we should seek to preserve.

Habermas the sociologist wants to “get it right,” to accurately describe the social world as he finds it; Habermas the epic theorist³⁴¹ wants to found a meta-political space that is capable of always transforming itself on the basis of a more fully realized rationality.

Habermas and Rawls’s brotherhood, both in its concurrences and in its disjunctures, is constellated, then, by an effort to imagine a meta-political “we.” They are family, it seems, because of their shared commitment to democratically imagined forms of the social family writ large: they both pursue the old liberal dream of a government whose authority is derived from the autonomous wills of the citizenry. That autonomy is doubly preserved by Habermas’s insistence that even the constitutionally ensconced principles of fair governance must be accessible to the rational and (always, at least potentially) ongoing reconsideration of a self-governing citizenry. Habermas wagers that the deontological content of liberalism can only be maintained by exposing its founding principles, and thus its sovereignty, to the ongoing possibility of a radical contestation.

This chapter explores the relationship between the construction of this “we” and the articulation of the “we” of a critical theory of politics that interrogates and seeks to transform the status quo. These two “we’s” are not precisely the same, but, as this chapter hopes to suggest, they can’t do without one another. On the one hand, a critical theory of politics intimates an ethos that disrupts the communicative ethics worked out by Habermas and, if he gets heard, Rawls. The moment of consensus that underwrites the action orienting potential of such an ethics always, despite its insistence on openness, runs the risk of closing off the full range of political discussion.

³⁴¹ Sheldon Wolin, “Political Theory as Vocation,” *The American Political Science Review*, Volume 63, Issue 4 (Dec., 1969), 1078.

On the other hand, a critical, transformative politics needs the theoretical resources developed within a communicative ethics in order to admirably orient itself towards the necessity of social action.³⁴² This need emerges along two different fronts. Along one of these fronts, a communicative ethics preempts an interventionary politic's tendency to prescribe concrete forms of life that resist democratic contestation. For any critical theory, the problem of how to best get from "here" to "there" needs to be suffused with an attentiveness to *how to get things done* without this necessity lapsing into a process that denies or threatens the ethical, political and economic autonomy of citizens. It is along these lines, in fact, that Habermas sees the connection between his articulation of a discourse ethics and the Marxist tradition of an interventionary, emancipatory politics. In defending (and appealing to) post-traditional liberal law, he argues that

After the collapse of state socialism ... the theoretical error of the defeated party is there for all to see: it mistook the socialist project for the design – and violent implementation – of a concrete form of life. If, however, one conceives "socialism" as the set of necessary conditions for emancipated forms of life about which the participants themselves must first reach an understanding, then one will recognize that the democratic self-organization of a legal community constitute the normative core of this project as well.³⁴³

Along a second front, the action coordinating capacities articulated by a communicative ethics complements the strategies of deferral and displacement that characterize poststructuralist strands of contemporary critical theory. Those discourses offer emancipatory thinking a way of intervening against an increasingly determinant

³⁴² White, *Political Theory and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), x, 19 - 28.

³⁴³ Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, xli.

instrumental reason, but they have a difficult time informing, on their own terms, a democratic, public process capable of choosing a best course of action.

What happens when the “we” that interrogates and seeks to transform the structures of capitalism, patriarchy, heterosexism and racism (and, as part of this effort, the inclusive meta-political spaces imagined by Rawls and Habermas) couples with the open-ended “we” that Habermas hopes to sustain through an appeal to the structures of argumentation? Can this marriage work? And if so, what would it look like? If the sleep of reason reason brings forth monsters, how will the monsters dreamed here be sutured together?

The “we” that is meant to emerge in this paper is the “we” of a more robust critical theory in which the different groups and individuals whose commitment to a more free and just society can, because of the dangers that inhere in even the most libidinal identity structures, only be tentatively constructed and must always be formed in such a way as to put itself into question. Foucault captures much of the agonal, self-subverting pleasure with which this “we” is meant to appear:

... I do not appeal to any “we” – to any of those “we’s” whose consensus, whose values, whose traditions constitute the framework for a thought and define the conditions in which it can be validated. But the problem is, precisely, to decide if it is actually suitable to place oneself within a “we” in order to assert the principles one recognizes and the values one accepts; or if it is not, rather, necessary to make the future formation of a “we” possible, by elaborating the question. Because it seems to me that the “we” must not be previous to the question; it can only be the result – and the necessarily temporary result – of the question as it is posed in the new terms in which one formulates it ...³⁴⁴

³⁴⁴ “Polemics, Politics, and Problemizations: An Interview,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 385.

In that spirit, “we” want to articulate a coalition for emancipatory thinking in terms of an interrogation of the meta-political space at which an emancipatory politics might aim. For though “we” find Habermas’s (but then, also, given the familial relationship, Rawls’) quest to retrieve (but also to endorse and to create) a fallibilist meta-politics necessary, “we” want to suggest that such a politics needs to be augmented along two important, interrelated fronts. First, it is our³⁴⁵ contention that Rawlsian/Habermasian formulations fail to adequately attend to our political limitations and possibilities as *embodied selves*. Second, we worry that their politics still carries within their organizing assumptions a logic of assimilation. These two problematics form the site of articulation of our alliance with Habermas and Rawls’s postmetaphysical deontological liberal ideals.

In what follows, we try to address both of these concerns by trying to reimagine liberal thinking in relation to an alternative conception of desire that interrupts (but in doing so complements) the desire for consensus and fairness at which the meta-political architectures of Habermasian and Rawlsian liberalism necessarily aims. We have, in earlier chapters, traced this alternative conception of desire as it emerges out of what at first appears to be the all too conventional understanding of heterosexual desire that permeates Nietzsche’s life and thinking. Nietzsche’s well-known misogyny, we have argued earlier, is complicated by Nietzsche’s famous comparison of “woman” and the “truth.”³⁴⁶ Both, in rather familiar terms, are in some sense the object of a vulgar possessiveness. It seems clear that he wants “woman,” and, as a philosopher, it is

³⁴⁵ Even when forget to specifically mark “we” and “our” with quotes, their provisional status should not be doubted by the reader.

³⁴⁶ “Perhaps truth is a woman.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 38, and the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 1.

undeniable that he wants the “truth.” Nietzsche’s perspectivism, however, already subverts the *telos* of this desire. If we remember that metaphor suggests a transformation, a carrying across of meaning, we can understand Nietzsche's comparison of “woman” and “truth” as an invitation to explore this metaphorical juncture in a way that transforms our conventional understanding of these two terms. In coming to recognize that claims to understand truth in its totality ignore that all such claims occur from a situated and thus partial perspective, Nietzsche also comes to conclude that what is certain about "woman" (the feminine) is that, as Derrida puts it, she "does not allow herself to be possessed."³⁴⁷ Desire, reimagined in these terms, is eventually picked up by an array of post-Nietzschean thinkers – including Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Butler, Irigaray, and Haraway – in their efforts to cultivate an alternative to the dangers of a merely dialectical assimilation. Not only does Nietzsche’s encounter with woman/truth militate against their final consummation, in doing so it opens the path of desire towards multiple, unforeseen trajectories. Desire is no longer merely the pursuit of what one lacks; it is also a creative and productive process. From the perspective of an author who imagines politics from a received heterosexual position (such as this author), the incommensurable encounter with “woman,” the “feminine,” and “feminism” productively disrupts the conclusion of that politics.

In this chapter, we want to insinuate this moment of disruption into the symmetrical relationships that undergird the meta-political ideals or Habermasian/Rawlsian liberalism. The symmetry on which these metapolitical architectures rest occludes, we argue, that which remains excessive to their economies of

³⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida, “The Question of Style” in *The New Nietzsche* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 179.

transparent democratic exchange. This moment of irruption (yes, I know that I said “disrupt” above, but this moment is no doubt already there, on the inside), it seems, might eventually cultivate a different way of hearing, thematizing the interrelated ethical and epistemological questions about how we should comport ourselves towards something that we don’t, and in some sense, can’t, know. What is at stake here, both as a matter of confrontation and consensus, then, is a “we” whose fabrication we can’t avoid.

II. Post-utopian Critical Theory: Liberalism and The Languages of Political Intervention

For a normative political theorist, the question of identity is the double question of who we are and who we want to be. In choosing to write critically about the normative implications of reigning political and economic structures, one gestures, however subtly, toward the inevitable problem of utopia. It would seem, after all, that any effort to elucidate the constraints of a status quo *as constraints* already suggests that things might be otherwise. Whether or not it is examined, or only if it exists as a crypto-normativity, a *critical politics* implies something akin to a utopian political space. This call, however, carries the critical theorist towards dangerous ground. To say it most strongly, at the level of the meta-political imagination, is to recall how the noble futures promised by Hitler, Stalin, and Pol Pot collapsed into totalitarian horror; this link between critical social theory and its utopian aspirations, in fact, has become an epoch defining problematic.³⁴⁸ To say it less strongly, at a different level of effect, any interventionary

³⁴⁸ The effect of historical fascism and the holocaust on those thinkers who came to intellectual maturity in the 50s and early 60s should not be underestimated. Habermas recounts, for example, how when listening to the Nuremberg trials he was unable, like many of the older generation, to ignore “the fact of a collectively realized inhumanity ...” Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, Cambridge, 1983, 2. This encounter with historical fascism explains, in part, the degree to which the problematic of fascism has insinuated itself across nearly all levels of social theory, becoming a label for an authoritarianism that we desire. This is how Foucault, for example, recognizes Deleuze and Guattari’s response to the threat of

politics implies an identifiable future at which, however inchoately, it aims. The sometimes exclusionary practices of progressive political efforts like the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement and feminism (or, at other times, the difficulties that they have experienced because of their failure to “close ranks”), attest to this difficulty. At both ends of this spectrum, a general logic of identity marks both the promise and the danger of the world that we would call into being.

Thus, though the critical social theorist is faced with the task of articulating a normatively driven alternative to the current sociopolitical order, he or she can no longer avoid thinking through and against the authoritarian necessity borne by that effort. A legitimate role for the social theorist, then, is to explore ways of thinking and speaking that would allow him or her to maintain the problematics of this tension as he or she attends to the relationship between theory and practice. One is enjoined to theorize about identities, whether individually, collectively, or meta-politically, in ways that already call such identities into question.

One way in which the liberal political and ethical schemas offered by Rawls and Habermas have sought to maintain such a fallibilist attitude is by distinguishing the political from any specific ontology or from any specific notion of the good life. Though it might seem untenable to conflate “ontology” and “the good life” in this way, it is enough to say here that both function within Rawls and Habermas’s forms of contemporary Kantian liberal theory as sites whose fundamental assumptions cannot be

(various) fascism(s): “And not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini – which was able to mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively –but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us.” We note here the link that Foucault makes between desire and fascism. Michael Foucault, Preface to *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), xiii.

disputed by reasonable, political discourse.³⁴⁹ For both Rawls and Habermas, the political, as a distinct sphere of activity, marks a region in which individual actors suspend their allegiance to a particular form of life in order to maintain a diverse yet coherent social order. Rawls, for example, argues for a “political conception” of the ideal liberal state in which “the comprehensive philosophical and moral views we are wont to use in debating fundamental political issues should” be suspended by “‘citizens’ reasoning in the public forum about constitutional essentials and questions of justice.” By suspending our metaphysical and ontological investments in “the personal, the familial, and the associational,” we are able to specify the “political domain and its conception of justice in such a way that its institutions can gain the support of an overlapping consensus.”³⁵⁰ Similarly, Habermas, in clarifying a discursive ethics that can be derived from his notion of an ideal speech situation, argues that in “view of the morally justified pluralism of life projects and life-forms, philosophers can no longer provide on their own account *generally binding* directives concerning the meaning of life.”³⁵¹ Habermas recognizes that “ethical-existential questions ... that force the individual or group to clarify who they are and who they would like to be” are often “of greater concern to us than questions of justice,” but he argues that only questions of justice are amenable to procedural processes that would (at least ideally) account for the perspectives of all those possibly affected.³⁵²

³⁴⁹ For a discussion of the use and transformation of the notion of “ontology” in contemporary political theory, see Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3–12. The ontology that lurks within this narrative’s articulation of critical theory is kin to what White calls a “weak ontology.”

³⁵⁰ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 10-11.

³⁵¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), 75.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 151.

These liberal meta-political spaces are not, despite these claims, completely devoid of ethical-ontological content. Nor need they, despite the claims of “communitarian” thinkers such as Michael Sandel, imply a lifeless, merely procedural, republic.³⁵³ For beyond those theories of politics (Schumpeter, for example) that describe democratic institutions solely in terms of their efficiency in rendering policy outputs, meta-political democratic theories (like those offered by Rawls and Habermas) have a normative orientation that militates against the dehumanizing and depoliticizing effects of any such “machine.” Liberals, however, because they are wary of expressing any allegiance to a particular form of life, often under-articulate the ethos implied by their work. The very contestation and cooperation necessary for the more fully pluralist democratic politics suggested by Rawls and Habermas *begins*, inchoately, to articulate an attitude, or a disposition, or ethos that is both fundamental to such a politics and instrumental in its own constitutive process of overcoming. Habermas’s effort, in particular, to ground his brand of critical theory in an appeal to intersubjective contestation places him in a lineage stretching from Pericles through Socrates and Aristotle to Jefferson, Emerson, and John Stuart Mill that considers discursive pluralist

³⁵³ Sandel argues, “that the liberalism of the procedural republic provides the public philosophy by which we live. Despite its philosophical failings, it is the theory most thoroughly embodied in our practice.” “What goes wrong with the philosophy shows up in the practice.” The procedural republic “cannot sustain the kind of political community and civic engagement that liberty requires.” *Democracy’s Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 24. Susan Okin has pointed out an embarrassingly underthematized difficulty with these assertions: Sandel seems to assert that liberal theory engenders social practices. *The American Political Science Review*, Volume 91, Issue 2 (June 1997), 440 - 442. A more nuanced account of how theory and practice -- theory and its material foundations, theory and what Rawls calls “the fact of pluralism” -- are related, might enrich Sandel’s argument. Interestingly, Sandel himself has argued that the sealed conditions of the original position in fact ensconce its own preunderstanding of the good. *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

engagement to be a virtue in itself.³⁵⁴ In suggesting a pluralist meta-politics, Rawls and Habermas suggest the necessity of exploring *how to live democratically*. To use the language of William Connolly, who remains wary of Rawls and Habermas's inattentiveness to the necessity of developing this attitude, these meta-political formulations imply an *ethos of pluralization*.³⁵⁵

In fact, the impurity of Kantian liberal political theory has been recognized at least since Hegel's critique of Kant's injunction to act only on the basis of universal maxims. Seyla Benhabib nicely captures the force of Hegel's objection to this version of the categorical imperative. Hegel, she reminds us, uses Kant's own example of the dilemma of "whether or not I should return deposits entrusted to me." Kant, reflecting liberal assumptions about propriety, argues that we should return deposits because it is irrational to will that there should be no deposits. Hegel "answers that there is no contradiction in willing a situation in which deposits and property do not exist, unless of course we make some other assumptions about human needs, scarce resources, distributive justice and the like." Thus, as Benhabib puts it, "from the pure form of the moral law alone, no concrete maxims of action can follow and if they do, it is because other unidentified premises have been smuggled into the argument."³⁵⁶ Similarly, Rawls' original position has been accused of front-loading a normative self-understanding that it is supposed to construct,³⁵⁷ and Habermas's ideal-speech situation, it has been

³⁵⁴ For a more developed account of Habermas's position within the tradition of "radical democracy," see Mark E. Warren, "The Self in Discursive Democracy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 167.

³⁵⁵ William Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

³⁵⁶ Benhabib, 26 – 27.

³⁵⁷ Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 30.

persuasively argued, presupposes an attitude on the part of participants that cannot be accounted for by the neutral processes of communicative exchange.³⁵⁸

Strong Kantians, Rawlsians and Habermasians, of course, might be interested in refuting these kinds of charges, but we hope to preserve their pragmatic suspicion. For in the end, this flaw in Kant's original formulation of the moral law, and the analogous flaws preserved in the original position and the ideal speech situation, mark part of the robust alchemy of a maturing communicative ethics. In turning our attention to these disjunctures in the purity of liberal moral schemes, we can better understand the force and the limits of this ethics within our more broadly constructed critical theory.

If, typically, the unproblematic notion of desire that functions in a thinking gives the time of that thought, governing the relationship of that thinking toward its aim, we must commit ourselves to an analysis of this desire and its implications for specific forms of political practice. Looking at the place that desire might occupy in (relationship to) the deliberative spaces of liberal political theory is suggestive of how the weak ontological content of liberal theory might make itself felt in ways that subvert its otherwise implacable momentum towards consensus and enclosure. Typically, in later day liberal architectures, desire functions as an unproblematic ontological substrate whose effects are integrated within the overall coherence of a constructivist theory in ways that cover over the operation of that desire. Desire informs the construction of the deliberative space enshrined by such theory, and it prefigures the way in which the agents occupying this space will think. Rawls, to give one example, tries to show how a hierarchy of analytical distinctions between different levels of desire allows the constructivist to

³⁵⁸ Axel Honneth, "The Other of Justice: Habermas and the Ethical Challenge of Postmodernism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, ed. by Stephen K. White (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 318.

sidestep the question of why actors would be motivated to behave the way they do in an ideally constructed political space.³⁵⁹ Rawls distinguishes between object-dependent desires, principle-dependent desires, and conception-dependent desires. Object-dependent desires are any desires – such as bodily desires for food, drink, sleep and/or pleasure – that “can be described without the use of any moral conceptions, or reasonable or rational principles.”³⁶⁰ Principle-dependent desires are those for whom “the object or aim of the desire, or the activity in which we desire to engage, cannot be described without using the principles ... that enter into specifying that activity.”³⁶¹ Concept-dependent desires, in turn, are those that inform our choice of the principles that will help articulate “a certain rational or reasonable conception, or political ideal.”³⁶² While it is certainly useful at a certain level to distinguish between different kinds of desires – to recognize, for example, that our desire for another human’s intimate touch is different from our desire for social justice – there is also something disingenuous in such a typology. It ignores the possibility that these desires for different objects, principles, and concepts are governed by a general notion of desire that itself needs to be problematized and which does not necessarily respect the categorical purity of analytic thinking. If contract theory could generally be read as the story of how this desire is analytically dissected, re-routed, regulated and put to use at the level of society by the rational agreement of all concerned actors, we want instead to make productive use of how the question of desire clouds the categorical clarity from which contract theory gains its strength.

³⁵⁹ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 82ff.

³⁶⁰ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 82.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 83 – 84.

Though we have been tracing an emergent ethos of transformation by attending to a Nietzschean desire that emerges in the *dynamis*³⁶³ of his life/work and in the texts of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Irigaray, Butler, Haraway, and others, we should note that a concern with interrelated notions of desire and *ethos* is already operative within *this* particular strand of liberalism. Standing at a beginning of Rawls and Habermas's liberal lineage, Rousseau recognized that *disposition* is a fundamental problematic with which any transformative, founding politics must wrestle;³⁶⁴ he recognizes that any analytically constructed basis for political legitimacy is always polluted by the problem of the citizens' desires – *what* is it that a people want? *Why* is it that they want this form of political and social life?³⁶⁵ As Rousseau essays this problematic, he explains that the “part with which the great lawgiver concerns himself in secret,” is how to engrave “in the hearts of the citizens” the “moral habits, customs, and, above all, of opinion ...”³⁶⁶ Otherwise, the hope of practically effecting the just city, or the general will, or the

³⁶³ “... the *dynamis* of that borderline between the “work” and the “life,” the system and the subject of the system. This borderline – I call it *dynamis* because of its force, its power, as well as its virtual and mobile potency -- ...” Derrida, “Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Proper Name”, trans. by Avital Ronell, in *The Ear of the Other*, ed. by Christie V. McDonald (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 5.

³⁶⁴ “If the third *Discourse* is best thought of an 18th-century ‘Theory of Justice,’ ... it has to be said that Rousseau’s grasp of the political implications of equalitarian justice is far more sophisticated, or at least a great deal more open and candid than anything that can be found in Rawls’ work. Rousseau was under no illusion that equalitarian society could come into existence merely through men’s contemplation of abstractly stated principles of justice, or even systematic education in any ordinary sense of the word. What was required, as Rousseau sees shrewdly and states brilliantly, was a totally new conception of power, one that instead of being remote superstructure would penetrate the most intimate recesses of the social order, indeed of the human mind.” Robert Nisbet, “Rousseau and Equality,” in *Rousseau’s Political Writings*, trans. By Julia Conaway Bondanella, ed. by Alan Ritter and Julia Conaway Bondanella (New York: Norton, 1988), 230.

³⁶⁵ Those moments when the desire of the author inscribes itself on the text remind us of the stubborn hold of mnemotechnically entrenched patterns of social production. In the midst of explaining how the reformed consciousness achieved by the social contract would strongly militate against the need for punishment, for example, Rousseau suddenly breaks off: “But I feel my heart murmuring and holding back my pen; let us leave the discussion of these questions to the just man who has never erred, and who himself has never needed pardoning.” Rousseau, *On Social Contract*, 105.

³⁶⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On Social Contract*, trans. by Julia Conaway Bondanella, in *Rousseau’s Political Writings*, ed. by Alan Ritter and Julia Conaway Bondanella (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 118.

categorical imperative, or the original position, or the ideal speech situation – of turning the ideal enunciated in these ideal spaces into real political institutions – cannot even be feigned. Rousseau here signals a conceit that is somewhat submerged in Kantian and post-Kantian liberal theory but whose import for critical theory cannot be overlooked: Rousseau asserts that, because the lawgiver must create the institutions that will subsequently shape society, “Anyone who dares to undertake the founding of a people should feel himself (sic) capable of changing human nature ...”³⁶⁷

This transformation, however, can never simply be a matter of setting up the right kinds of institutions. Any total transformation of the social is constantly impeded by a (con)founding paradox:³⁶⁸

In order for a nascent people to appreciate sound political maxims and follow the fundamental rules of statecraft, the effect would have to become the cause; the social spirit, which should be the product of the way in which the country was founded would have to preside over the founding itself; and, before the creations of the laws, men would have to be what they should become by means of those same laws.³⁶⁹

Foundational theories, like Rousseau’s, that grow out of a pervasive critique of existing society, are necessarily bound up with new kinds of self-understandings that might be available to those living in a world different from their own. Unlike those philosophers and social scientists who “have only *interpreted* the world,” the critical theorist’s desire “to change it”³⁷⁰ necessitates the creation of a “new man.” The question of *the transformation*

³⁶⁷ Rousseau, *On Social Contract*, 108.

³⁶⁸ William Connolly calls this passage “the paradox of political founding,” *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 138.

³⁶⁹ Rousseau, 109.

³⁷⁰ Karl Marx, *Theses on Feurbach*, in the *Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978), 145.

of consciousness – of restructuring what the people want – is implicit in every effort to interrogate and change, and not merely reproduce, the realities of contemporary politics.

Of course, the problem of how to transform the self-understanding of the citizenry has often been “solved,” both in the history of political theory and in actual practice, by applying different degrees of force. Socrates, for example, would found his ideally just city on a “noble lie.” Hobbes would give Leviathan an absolute right of naming and a monopoly on violence. As modern technologies begin to close the gap between theory and practice, the Jacobins will invoke Rousseau in forcing the recalcitrant to be free. Soviet Russia calls on Marx’s “dictatorship of the proletariat” in order to convince capitalists of the evils of private property. To combat the evil to which citizens had been habituated to by city life, Pol Pot insists on green acres. Both conservatives and liberal-capitalist apologists, in fact, often dismiss all transformative, critical politics on these grounds; from their perspectives, political theory’s great challenges to the modern hegemony of liberal individualism, Rousseau and Marx, being premised on the authoritarian violence necessary for the creation of a new man, have naturally come a cropper at the guillotine and in the gulag.

The empirical realities of these links should not, however, predetermine the dismissal of these thinkers from the constellation of an emancipatory thought’s resources.³⁷¹ If nothing else, we need to conscientiously examine what links a thinking

³⁷¹ Both the Jacobins and Pol Pot made explicit claims that Rousseau was an explicit influence on their unapologetically violent political activity. As critical theorists, we can never ignore the proximity of Rousseau’s thought to these terrors. In fact, it is part of our responsibility to trace out the ways in which any thinking, and the language in which it intractably occurs, authorizes totalitarian horror. With the Rousseau of Robespierre and Pol Pot, but also with the Marx of Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Tse-Tung, with the Nietzsche of the Nazis, with Heidegger and de Man, the dangerous question of the relationship of philosophical thinking and political terror is always being raised anew.

For those who would too neatly package their political-philosophical allegiances on the bases of such influences, Foucault recounts an interesting story told to him by Habermas. Habermas, in the context

(like Rousseau's, or Marx's, or Nietzsche's) to totalitarian murder and genocide; we need – to reduce it to a banal formula – to take up and sustain the problematic of the relationship between political theory and political practices. In fact, it is the historically certifiable dangers of Rousseau's thinking coupled with his instructive observations about the paradoxes of political founding, mnemotechnic enculturation and the perceived necessity of transforming human nature that mark his thinking as an important limit experience for both liberal political theory and critical theory. It is, at the very least, a warning at sites where critical theory must think.

In any case, to read Rousseau as merely being a proto-totalitarian oversimplifies the complexity of his political-philosophical project. He repeatedly underlines the limited force of force. He suggests, in fact, that violent force is not characteristic of the great lawgiver. Force only has temporary authority, thus it must be transformed into a duty. Furthermore, and tellingly, because "Force is a physical power," no "morality can

of his long held contention that "Heidegger's thought indeed constituted a political disaster," recounted his disappointment that he had "found some texts from around 1934 by this illustrious Kantian" that were pro-Nazi. Foucault goes on to recount his own similar experience in discovering that the Stoic Max Pohlenz had written a text strongly arguing a philosophically tenable basis of Nazism. Foucault notes that "Nothing in this condemns Stoicism or Kantianism," but he is more concerned with establishing that the link between any theory and its use in defense of a particular political practice is tenuous at best. We should understand our relationship to the ideas of political thinkers not as an opportunity to "apply" these ideas, "but in order to put them to the test and to modify them." The real test of "the personal poetic attitude of the philosopher is not to be sought in his ideas, as if it could be deduced from them, but rather in his philosophy-as-life, in his philosophical life, his ethos." Michel Foucault, "Politics and Ethics: An Interview," trans. by Catherine Porter, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 373 – 74. For a sustained treatment of the value of this valuation of philosophy, see Alexander Nehemas, *The Art of Living* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1998).

Another anecdote that complicates any overly simplistic understanding of the relationship between theory (and philosophy) and practice is worth considering here. In Arendt's portrait of Eichmann as someone who did whatever he did "as far as he could see, as a law abiding citizen," she reports that he "declared with great emphasis that he had lived his whole life according to Kant's moral principles." Arendt argues that this can only make sense if the categorical imperative had been distorted to read, "Act in such a way that the Führer, if he knew your action, would approve it." Arendt suggests that Kant was understood in this way in general, "household," usage amongst Germans and that this understanding actually contributed to a self-understanding in which it would be logical "that nothing than going beyond the call of duty will do." Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 135 – 37.

result from its effects.”³⁷² In fact, it is not characteristic of a legitimate political regime. Rousseau is apparently referring here to the force of direct physical violence (or its threat), because he recognizes that the great lawgiver is, in part, characterized by his deployment of a different kind of force. A great lawgiver “imperceptibly substitutes the force of habit for that of authority.”³⁷³ Rousseau, and in this limited way his thought can be constellated with Nietzsche and Foucault’s,³⁷⁴ holds that humans are, if nothing else, malleable. They are “infinitely perfectible,” to use his phrase; paradoxically this means that men and women can and have been molded incorrectly and that, however entrenched these effects might be, they would have to be transformed in order to create a just society legitimated by a competently applied general will.

Rousseau recognizes the fantastic tinge to thinking that one could transform the political and social world in which he wrote.³⁷⁵ In large part, the unlikelihood of such a transformation is ensured by the mnemotechnically entrenched habits of civilized

³⁷² Rousseau, 87. In one sense, this observation is merely consonant with the liberal hope of abstracting out of the messy realities of politics in order to get clear about the rational bases of political legitimacy. For as Rawls points out, even if power is distributed across a field of actors (as Madison would have it), its successful management is only a *modus vivendi*. Similarly, the ultimate coherence of Habermas’s project leans on the hope that within the rational structure of language there lies a non-strategic basis for social cooperation.

³⁷³ Rousseau, 118.

³⁷⁴ Nietzsche himself marks the limits of any such comparison of Nietzsche and Rousseau’s projects. See, for example, *The Will to Power*, 61 – 64. For a more sustained discussion on this limit, see Penelope Deutscher, “‘Is it not remarkable that Nietzsche ... should have hated Rousseau?’: Woman, femininity: Distancing Nietzsche from Rousseau,” in *Nietzsche, Feminism, and Political Theory*, Paul Patton, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1993), and Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche Contra Rousseau: A Study of Nietzsche’s Moral and Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

³⁷⁵ This should not be taken to mean that Rousseau thought that his conceptualization of political legitimacy was utterly without practical possibility. One might hold with Judith Shklar that though the “conditions that he set” for the possibility that a form of political organization “might seem utopian,” they are in fact “an exact estimate of the full cost of equality.” In fact, we don’t want to dismiss this reading of the practically directed Rousseau, we merely want to avoid having this reading close down the ironic mnemotechnical possibilities that also seem to operate in his texts. Judith N. Sklar, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Equality,” in *Rousseau’s Political Writings*, ed. by Alan Ritter and Julia Conaway Bondanella (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 267.

cultures;³⁷⁶ “Like men,” he laments, “peoples are docile only in their youth; in growing old, they become incorrigible.” “Once customs are established and prejudices have taken root,” the effort to reform the people “is a vain and dangerous undertaking.”³⁷⁷

Accordingly, only a “few well constituted states are to be seen,” and as far as he can see, only Corsica will be able to realize his notion of the legitimate state.³⁷⁸

Rousseau reopens, within the liberal tradition, the questions of embodiedness and habituation that tend to be precluded or underemphasized in Rawls and Habermas’s metapolitical architectures. His attentiveness to the less violent forms of an inscriptive mnemotechnical power and his recognition that the link between this power and the inculcation of the social is an unavoidable aspect of political practice reopens an underthought moment in the work of his liberal heirs such as Rawls and Habermas. Though Rousseau’s vision of total transparency (and the hyperbolic enactment of its founding logic in the horrors of modernity) is anathema to a critical theory that endeavors towards a more radically democratic future, the possibility that the secret concern of the lawgiver – the installation of feelings in the habits – should, at least in part, be attended to at the level of language is of the utmost importance for any critical thinking. Language, rather than being abstracted from the corporeal and the material, Rousseau seems to suggest, is actually another site where social practices and attitudes are inscribed on the body, a place where the habitual rhythms of social reproduction are effected, contested and transformed. Language, turning on secretiveness (as the lawmakers secret task), functions here in a way that is foreign to Habermas’s ideal speech situation or Rawls’

³⁷⁶ Nietzsche’s discussion of mnemotechnics in *On the Genealogy of Morals* is summarized above in Chapter 2.

³⁷⁷ Rousseau, 111.

³⁷⁸ Rousseau, 115.

original position. Rather, in the density of a withdrawal, this use of language insists on the strangeness of its meaning, syntax, rhythm, mood and tempo; and it is in the insistence of this (at least immediate) incommensurability, that language unseats a naturalized consensus by marking out the space of a constitutive difference within the received language in which it is set to work.

Rousseau, wittingly or not, reminds us that the “incommensurable” (that which is incommensurable in the language of the status quo) always plays a fundamental role in the revolution of consciousness. He intrudes into his text, demanding of his readers that they *learn to listen* to the (immediately) incommensurable logic and rhetoric of his thought. As he strains to bring into being a new way of imagining ourselves as individuals and as a society, he begins to recognize that the very language he uses constrains our capacity to think differently than we think today. He reminds the readers of *On Social Contract*, for example, of the limits of the text’s effort at linear exposition: “All my ideas are interconnected, but I cannot set them forth all at once.”³⁷⁹ Or he warns, at the beginning of chapter one of Book III: “I warn the reader that this chapter must be read carefully, and that I lack the skill to make myself clear to anyone who is unwilling to be attentive.”³⁸⁰ The point here is that one of the ways in which Rousseau might be said to counter the status quo in which he found himself is in the way that the strangeness of his syntax effects a different way of experiencing our political possibilities. Reading Rousseau, following the rhythm preserved in his writing, cultivates a disposition that opens us towards different understandings of the fundamental terms – such as “freedom” – that circulate within and sustain so much of contemporary political discourse.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Rousseau, 118.

Rawls and Habermas themselves use rhetorical devices to reinforce the cohesive force of a rationally or reasonably conceived political space. Nancy Love has noted, for example, how their use of musical metaphors of harmony, orchestration, and measure reinforce their conceptualization of a centripetal conception of political community.³⁸¹ In response to this Rawlsian-Habermasian valuation of composition, the soundtrack that has been running throughout *this* narrative, and suggested here by Rousseau, strikes a discordant note within theories of political liberalism and communicative action that would run counter to their harmony, measure, and tempo. Nietzsche and those who think in his wake recognize that even the structure of grammar, far from being a neutral matrix³⁸² useful for constructing rational arguments, actually sustains certain understandings of the religious and the political by habituating us to the tempo of its measure. This narrative aspires towards an alternative music, a different kind of love song. But if such alternatives can profitably complicate the tempo of Rawls and Habermas's thinking by more fully thematizing questions of disposition, it also seems the case that we need to put counter-tempos into practice that might interrupt the habitual rhythms of the unproblematically capitalist times in which we live.

And this perhaps is why some of us latter day leftist are so attracted to Nietzsche, despite the archaic yearning for aristocratic hierarchy that runs counter to our socialist and democratic preferences. A musical dreamer himself, he was attuned to thinking against the measure and tempo of his age, of articulating a thought that is untimely. "Above all, let us say it *slowly* ...," Nietzsche implores in the preface to *Daybreak*. He and his book "are friends of *lento*." Philology, Nietzsche can now appreciate, has

³⁸¹ Nancy Love, paper presented at the 1999 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association.

³⁸² One should, of course, note the etymological association between "matrix" and "womb."

inculcated him in being “a teacher of slow reading” and writing. Nietzsche now recognizes that the disciplinary force of philology has equipped him to resist the colonizing tempo of his age. Philology, which “demands of its votaries” ... “to go aside, to take time, to become still, to become slow ...” Here, Nietzsche valorizes the space of an interruption against the back drop of an increasingly sped-up, instrumentally oriented world – “an age of ‘work,’ that is to say, of hurry, of indecent and perspiring haste, which wants to ‘get everything done’ at once, including every old or new book ...” But more than valorize this space, Nietzsche seeks to effect this tempo of reading by writing in a way that demands this attentiveness. Nietzsche’s book “desires for itself only perfect readers and philologists: *learn to read me well!* –”³⁸³

Thus, to say it differently (that’s the point), we would have to begin to reimagine the time of desire, the reading and writing of desire. This is precisely the technology that Deleuze and Guattari see at work in Nietzsche’s thinking: “It seems to us that fragmentary writing is not so much the issue with Nietzsche. It is instead speeds and slownesses: not writing slowly or rapidly, but rather writing, and everything else besides, as a production of speeds and slownesses between particles.”³⁸⁴ Of course, the rhetorical aim of this rethinking of political desire is to open up a hitherto impossible world, but we do not need to imagine that this intervention into the discursive practices of desire will, in the flash of a total transformation, overturn in its totality the world in which we live. Such an intervention in the processes of reading/writing ourselves, however, can be a point of entry, the site of a humble and patient agency.

³⁸³ Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5. See also *Beyond Good and Evil*, 100. “Every morality is, as opposed to *laissez aller*, a bit of tyranny against ‘nature’; also against ‘reason’; but this in itself is no objection, as long as we do not have some other morality which permits us to decree that every kind of tyranny and unreason is impermissible.”

³⁸⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 269.

Nietzsche observes, at the beginning of the second book of *The Gay Science*, “that what things are called is comparably more important than what they are.” Those names, arbitrarily “thrown over things like a dress [!], gradually grows to be part of the thing and turns into its very body.” As such, our effort to create something new is bound up with linguistic creation: “it is enough to create new names and estimations and probabilities in order to create in the long run new things.”³⁸⁵ There are ways in which we need to make this work proper to the time of a critical theory; finding in “local” resistance, patiently pursued, a way of initiating a questioning of the implied totality of social relations. Nietzsche intimates a strategy of encounter, an attitude of comportment that could cultivate a moment of hearing that opens any “I” or “we” outside of itself. Thus we must say, “let what is strange into your language.” Do not insist on converting that which enters into your language into the code that has always empowered it. Give to your thought the gift of something that is incommensurable with the inevitable movement of its time.

Particularly against the backdrop of capitalism’s awesome colonizing power, the utopian moment of Rawls and Habermas’s meta-politics must find those points of access where it can begin to cultivate the disposition implied in their conceptions of postmetaphysical democracy. *Perhaps it is at the level of specific, concrete encounters, encounters where singularities collide and risk their identity.* As Habermas argues, any “project that wants to shift the balance” away from the political imperatives of late capitalism “through solidarity has to mobilize” an arena of politics “in which subtle communication flows determine the form of political culture and, with the help of

³⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 58, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 121 – 122.

definitions of reality, compete for what Gramsci called cultural hegemony.”³⁸⁶ The competition about understandings of the good life that arises in this cultural arena, Habermas suggests, can be arrayed against an institutional politics that preserves the status quo. Here, where the major issues “are the integrity and the autonomy of lifestyles, perhaps the protection of traditionally established subcultures or changes in the grammar of traditional forms of life,” new social movements can disrupt the circular reproduction of society, effecting changes “in the trend of the *Zeitgeist*.”³⁸⁷ These “new conflicts” that “arise along the seams between system and lifeworld” offer the opportunity to gain a foothold against the dominating influence of the instrumental rationality of modern life.³⁸⁸

Perhaps, then, this is what we have been learning in articulating a notion of “critical desire,” to read and hear that which appears as “other” to our normal modes of thought, experience and comportment. Reading the general economy of interruption presaged by “critical desire” transversally, across different domains of desire, can be instructive for the way in which we encounter concrete others in our daily political and interpersonal experiences. Or to say it slightly differently, the interruption of desire by an otherness that remains beyond its ken needs to be “thought of” in both temporal and spatial terms.

³⁸⁶ Habermas. “The Crisis of the Welfare State,” in *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 297.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁸ Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: The MIT Press, 1987), 395.

III. The Feminist Other of Liberal Thought

Habermas finds in feminism an exemplary social movement along both of these dimensions. Feminism's appeal to "the redemption of a promise" that is "anchored" in "acknowledged universalistic foundations of morality and law" reflects its capacity to enter into the negotiated debate and consensus that would mark a more rational, just, and democratic polity. Feminism, however, also provides a critical lever that challenges the increasingly inevitable rationalization of society. Feminism's "element of particularity" implies that feminism already looks beyond its concern with "establishing formal equality and eliminating male privilege"; it is also implicated in "overturning concrete forms of life marked by male monopolies." Women have access to a register of values that oppose the reinforcing hegemonies of male power and "a one-sidedly rationalized everyday practice."³⁸⁹

Habermas's valorization of autonomy, however, eventually complicates any conclusions about the "particularist element" of a feminist identity. He is sensitive, for example, to how basing legal remedies on a homogenized identity for women is often counterproductive. In areas ranging from welfare policy to no-fault divorce, "*overgeneralized classifications*" have been "used to label disadvantaging situations and disadvantaged groups of persons."³⁹⁰ Echoing the insights of Wendy Brown, Habermas stresses "to the extent that legislation and adjudication in these cases are oriented by traditional interpretive patterns, regulatory law consolidates the existing *stereotypes of gender identity*."³⁹¹ Such legislation, he laments, falls prey to "the assumption that the

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 393-94.

³⁹⁰ Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 423-24.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 423.

equal entitlement of the sexes can be achieved within the existing institutional framework and within a culture dominated and defined by men.”³⁹² Ultimately, only individual women and individual groups of women can give voice to their needs within the open-ended consensus produced by a rationally negotiated democratic politics.

Habermas’s effort to elucidate both the negative and positive impact of an increasingly dominant instrumental rationality on the possible contours of identity formation, and his observations about the ambiguous results of policies pursued in the name of an overarching feminist identity, goes a long way in suggesting a normative framework around which the goals of a critical feminist politics might be organized. Importantly, he has recognized two moments where a principle of difference could characterize such a politics. On the one hand, feminism is a form of political intervention that has access to a particular structured experience that differentiates it from a male dominated, increasingly rationalized status quo. On the other hand, it is a form of political intervention that has become increasingly aware that it must sustain its internal differences; to be wedded to an oversimplified notion of feminine identity is to reinscribe the delimiting force of identity, and its dependence on exclusion, that a critical feminism opposes. Unless feminism sustains its “feminine within,” its sense of a non-recuperable internal difference, the worry may be, it runs the risk of sacrificing the admirable critical function that Habermas recognizes in its practices. In either case, feminism is, and should remain, a difference that matters.

But does it matter in the important dimensions? While we endorse Habermas’s general effort to think difference within a constructed political space, we continue to

³⁹² Ibid.

worry about whether Habermas, given the mnemotechnical force of capitalist relations, bureaucratic structures and patterns of heterosexist meaning, adequately thinks through the difficulties of political transformation. Habermas certainly recognizes the link between the force of these structures and the possibilities of political autonomy, but it strikes us that even in these moments his recipe for political change is too wedded to the ordered symmetry of an ideal conversation.

One should nonetheless be wary of oversimplifying Habermas's position. He is not completely inattentive to the role that mnemotechnical and structural force plays in the potential for communicative action, nor is his thinking blind to the ways in which "otherness" poses an ongoing challenge for the universalism that underwrites his communicative ethics. In response to this first concern, Habermas wants to argue that communicative competence is bound up with the structural and material conditions of late modernity. Habermas is fully aware of the ways in which the systemic effects of capitalism and bureaucratically organized power relations colonize the traditional lifeworlds in which our identities are formed, but he argues that these effects are far from one-sided. Habermas argues, in contrast to those who dismiss the possibility of effecting radically democratic ideals within the milieu of late capitalism, that the material conditions that prevail in late modernity are increasingly structured by the demands of communicative competence.

Though this colonization of the lifeworld deprives individuals of most traditional sources of meaning, and though it threatens to obscure important dimensions of human experience formerly attended to by those traditions, it also creates the possibility for cultivating forms of life that escape the constraints of received traditions. In fact, such a

transformation is more than a voluntarist possibility; it is inevitable. Mark Warren nicely summarizes Habermas's position: "as societies become more complex, individuals find themselves inhabiting multiple and pluralistic roles for which traditional identities are unsuited."³⁹³ The inter- and intra- institutional exchanges necessary for the functioning of late-capitalist economies and politics are dependent upon the democratic capacities of those who occupy various roles within these institutions. These institutional roles offer sites where individuals are forced to define themselves in processes of discursive negotiation.³⁹⁴ For Habermas, Warren concludes, late modern experience is partly determined by "structural developments" that "throw individuals back onto their own resources to create their identities."³⁹⁵ Habermas, therefore, places a certain faith in the open-ended, reflexive capacities engendered by systematic demands for communicative competence.

So Habermas recognizes the ways in which the systematic demands for communicative competence mold us, but in these moments of optimism, he loses sight of our critical relationship to these kinds of self-understanding. Along these lines, Foucault expresses a suspicion about how Habermas gives to

communicative relations this place which is so important and, above all, a function that I would call "utopian." The idea that there could exist a state of communication that would allow games of truth to circulate freely, without any constraints or coercive effects, seems utopian to me. This is precisely a failure to see that power relations are not something that is bad in itself, that we have to break free of.

³⁹³ Mark Warren, "The Self in Discursive Democracy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, Stephen K. White, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 168.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 169.

I do not think that a society can exist without power relations, if by that one means strategies by which individuals try to direct and control the conduct of others. The problem, then, is not to try and dissolve them in the utopia of completely transparent communication but to acquire the rules of law, the management of techniques, and also the morality, the ethos, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games with as little domination as possible.³⁹⁶

Habermas has thought to soften these blows by framing a recent riff of his communicative ethics as being the effort to retrieve “the rational content of morality based on equal respect for everybody and on the universal solidarity and responsibility of each for all” in such a way as to avoid the “Postmodern suspicion of an indiscriminately assimilating and homogenizing universalism” that “in the heat of controversy obliterates the relational structure of otherness and difference that universalism, properly understood, precisely takes into account.” “Equal respect for *everyone*,” he adds, “is not limited to those who are like us; it extends to the person of the other in his or her otherness. And solidarity with the other *as one of us* refers to the flexible ‘we’ of a community that resists all substantive determinations and extends its permeable boundaries ever further.”³⁹⁷

Nonetheless, within the context of contemporary distributions of power and within the current field of available cultural meanings, an appeal to a communicatively mediated consensus risks drawing the opportunities and horizons of a social group’s (such as feminism) self-articulation back into the fold of the habitual, reproducing rather than challenging traditional self-understandings. Particularly for those who hold out

³⁹⁶ Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,” trans. P. Aranov and D. McGrawth, in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984*, vol. 1, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 298.

³⁹⁷ Habermas, “Preface,” in *The Inclusion of the Other*, xxxv – xxxvi.

hopes that feminism can be linked with a broader critical politics that challenges the current stranglehold on the *zeitgeist* maintained by liberal capitalism, the worry is that the utopian elements of a Habermasian approach to a critical feminism lacks a mechanism or a technique that would allow women to critically appraise the ways in which their subject positions are structured by various discursive-corporeal and economic-structural limits. A Habermasian or a Rawlsian liberalism pays insufficient attention to the embodied and material strictures that militate against the autonomy and respect for difference that their own participatory schemas putatively require.

Though Habermas's thesis of the colonization of the lifeworld is attentive to how capital distorts and shrinks the full potential for individual autonomy, he does not *fully thematize* how women might attune themselves to the ways in which *existent power relations take hold of the body at a pre-rational level*. Habermasian inspired approaches to feminist critical theory, we argue, could use a supplementary set of tools for diagnosing and responding to how the varied and specific forms of women's oppression come to be rationalized at this pre-rational level. By extension, what is true for Habermasian feminism is also true of Habermas's reflections as a whole; it is this feminism that marks, in its stubborn "otherness," the limits and dangers of a communicatively achieved consensus.

Seyla Benhabib has tried to augment³⁹⁸ Habermas's critical theory in a way that begins to address some of these concerns. She agrees with his effort to reclaim the consensual, egalitarian potential that inheres in the structure of everyday communication.

³⁹⁸ Kathleen Jones, *Compassionate Authority: Democracy and the Representation of Women* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 21 – 22. Jones recalls the etymology of authority in order to sketch an alternative to the dominant understanding of authority "as legitimately imposed order." "Authority" derives from *augere* (to augment) and connotes an activity of growth, not decay. In the public arena, authority expresses our connection with others as an augmentation of ourselves."

Furthermore, she agrees with Habermas that the structure of our encounter with the other is symmetrical. She breaks with Habermas, however, by complementing liberal theory's indebtedness to the notion of a "generalized other" with an orientation to the particular standpoint of a particular, "concrete other." As Iris Young puts it, Benhabib "endorses the universality of modern moral theory but insists that it include respect for concrete particular others in their narrative contexts, and not simply adherence to generalized principles that apply to all equally."³⁹⁹

Young notes that she shares much of Benhabib's account. She wishes, however, to complement Benhabib's complication of discourse ethics with "an account of moral respect and egalitarian reciprocity" that calls into questions a discourse ethics' assumptions about "symmetry, reversibility, and imaginatively occupying the position of others."⁴⁰⁰ Alternatively, drawing on the work of Levinas and Irigaray, Young endorses a theory of communicative action that would involve "an *asymmetrical reciprocity* between subjects." As she puts it, "Participants in communicative interaction are in a relation of approach." Interlocutors bring to their exchanges "a history and structured positioning that makes them different from one another, with their own shape, trajectory, and configuration of forces."⁴⁰¹

The discursive negotiation that marks a Rawlsian/Habermasian space assumes a reciprocity, or a symmetry, that is radically disrupted by forms of analyses that take into account the specificity of embodied, materially situated forms of oppression. Such analyses, if they are allowed to emerge within the constructed, utopian space of a

³⁹⁹ Iris Young, "Asymmetrical Reciprocity: On Moral Respect, Wonder, and Enlarged Thought," in *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 39.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

Rawlsian/Habermasian meta-politics, mark out singularities that are not definable by this utopia and which thus opens this utopian space outside of itself. A feminism that takes up an analysis of how the self-understandings available to women are produced by their “emplacement” within this larger discursive field gives rise to a radically nominalist politics that allows a critical theory, as it aspires towards a more just political future, to speak of a space that reopens that future.⁴⁰² Such a disruptive nominalism suggests that feminism imagine itself as a “heterotopian” rather than a utopian practice.⁴⁰³ This practice would allow feminism to maintain both an internal principle of difference *and* a disruptive function in relation to the utopian meta-politics suggested by a Rawls or a Habermas. Such a heterotopian emplacement is a real, tangible, and concrete space that cannot be seized by the reciprocal logic of a communicative utopia. As a feminist practice, it allows different women to articulate their different struggles in ways that resist the homogenizing momentum of a communicatively achieved identity.

Furthermore, from the perspective from which I (as a white, middle-class, heterosexual male) imagine a normative alternative to our current liberal-capitalist, patriarchal politics, feminist heterotopian practice functions as a mirror. It is not, however, a mirror which returns the image of the same to itself. Rather, it “makes this place I occupy at the moment I look at myself in the glass both utterly real, connected with the entire space surrounding it, and utterly unreal – since, to be perceived, it is

⁴⁰² Foucault defines emplacement as “the relations of proximity between points or elements.” “Different Spaces,” in *The Essential Works of Foucault: 1954-1984*, Vol. 2, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 176. Donna Haraway uses the term nominalism in the sense that it is used here. See “Ecce Homo, Ain’t (Ar’n’t) I a Woman, and Inappropriate/d Others: The Human in a Post-Humanist Landscape,” in *Feminist Theorize the Political*, Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 88. For a more general account of Haraway’s deployment of the forms of analyses sketched out in this paper, see [Modest Witness@Second Millenium](#). *Female Man Meets OncoMouse* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 125-30.

⁴⁰³ Foucault, “Different Spaces,” 178-79.

obliged to go by way of that virtual point which is over there.”⁴⁰⁴ This aporia of reflection decenters the “me” that takes up the position of the critical theorist and, in its disjunctive power, implies a transformation. And in recognizing this inescapable asymmetry, I might cultivate a new way of hearing, of seeing, that would be necessary for a more admirable comportment toward the other of feminism and for the arrival of a more just political future. I am opened to the reality and the possibility of intersubjectivity.

IV. Conclusion

A more mature communicative ethics would be able to draw together, and consider the relationship between, these two emendations to Habermas’s theory. Benhabib has argued that Habermas’s approach to a discourse ethics needs to take up a more sophisticated position on the ways that intersubjective communication occurs. In doing so, she thematizes one of these emendations: the tendency of a Habermasian approach to systematically discount the particular, embodied testimony of the “concrete other.” Young, in turn, has thematized a second emendation: by criticizing Benhabib’s account as itself oversimplifying, and thus distorting, the actual and most ethically admirable ways in which we encounter each other, Young argues for the necessity of complementing the ideal of symmetrical reciprocity with the interruption of an “asymmetrical reciprocity.”

In this dissertation, we have encountered this asymmetry within a Nietzschean lineage that we began to recount in chapter 2. On the one hand, we have seen how Nietzsche’s encounter with woman/truth thematizes the ultimately ungraspable content of the other of our thought and how the epistemic humility that such an encounter engenders

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 179.

is suggestive for the tenor of our ethical encounters. Furthermore, we have tried to show that even this moment of asymmetry, launched within a patriarchal discourse, runs the risk of being reinscribed within dominant forms of patriarchal thought and practice (see our account of Irigaray's amorous contestation of Nietzsche's thought in chapter 3). Finally, we have tried to show that a corporeo-ascetic aestheticism that is opened up and redeployed by strands of Nietzschean inspired thought might allow those who, in given social and political settings, find themselves occupying this space of disruptive otherness to somehow gain a foothold in their efforts to resist the imposition of various social constructions (see chapters 2 and 4). The technology of this heterotopian, critical, nominalist desire and its potential as a mnemotechnic encounter of difference emerge in the Nietzschean discourses of Foucault, Butler, Haraway, Derrida and Deleuze. The appropriation of this technology by feminism for itself has its dangers, but as part of an effort to complicate the homogenizing threat of consensus that inheres in a notion of the collective subject, the Nietzschean thought of embodied difference offers an important resource for feminism and for those who think about feminism in relation to an overarching notion of critical theory. We deploy this technology within feminism, hoping to initiate a movement of self-questioning of feminism's self-understanding from within that is capable of cultivating a difficult but emancipatory way of life that moves beyond feminism and infiltrates the political space that is coextensive with feminism's post-patriarchal imagination.

Some will argue that for the downtrodden this difficult way of life – articulated here through an ongoing re-reading of the philosophical tradition inaugurated by Nietzsche over 100 years ago – is asking too much. But casting political thought in terms

of a noble fiction does not speak against the reality and necessity of this difficult flexibility. The on-going contestation and renegotiation of identity is a practice in which we are all already involved. Particularly in first-world contexts, in which the mobile realities of the market place and communications technologies contour our self-understandings, the facts of identity formation have changed. It may have been plausible for Marx to think that factory conditions would allow for the formation and articulation of a proletarian class-consciousness, but the rise of commodity capitalism and new micro-electronic technologies do as much to decenter our identities as they do to consolidate them. In the context created by the decentering effects of late capitalism, there is a need for an alternative way of imagining political solidarity. The cross-cutting allegiances of our social world create points of convergence between feminists, people of color, gays, and the working class in an ongoing struggle to secure a more robustly democratic future.⁴⁰⁵ This logic informs a feminism that avoids ghettoizing itself and which speaks, from its position of difference, to the public at large. In doing so, it is our hope that such a feminism might continue to nourish a critical theory with which it, we hope, will continue to be imbricated.

The effort undertaken in this paper to think about the place of feminism within a broader notion of post-utopian critical theory, to think about its emplacement within a Nietzschean complication of Habermasian/Rawlsian meta-political formulations, has not been without its authorial presumptions. One should worry that they have only been played out as the pretense of a self-appointed “ringmaster of otherness”⁴⁰⁶ here. But if this post-utopian matchmaking has gained anything for a critical theory of politics by

⁴⁰⁵ Romand Coles, “Liberty, Equality, Receptive Generosity: Neo-Nietzschean Reflections on the Ethics and Politics of Coalition.” *American Political Science Review*. Vol. 90, No. 2, June 1996.

⁴⁰⁶ White, *Political Theory and Postmodernism*, 65.

bringing these strange bedfellows together, it is in thinking at a limit where the utopian necessity of any critical politics always exceeds its grasp. I thus engage post-Nietzschean philosophy and post-Nietzschean feminist theory in suggesting that accounting for “otherness,” giving the other a democratically justifiable hearing, presents difficulties that have been occluded by a Rawlsian/Habermasian pluralism. In theorizing “fairness” or “consensus” as the implicit criterion for linking democratic negotiation and action, Rawls and Habermas risk an insensitivity to the singularity of the other voice; that is, they enshrine a certain mode of hearing that is unaware of its own forms of deafness and which remains untouched by the staleness of its tempo, to its own immersion in a Platonic model for instructing an ideal citizen.

Though Habermas recognizes the problems that these questions pose for a discourse ethics, by embedding his discourse ethics in a wider theory of communicative *action*, he seems caught in a particular dialectical structure at the heart of his thinking. This particular understanding of dialectical thought preserves, we have argued, the object of its *techne*, and, in doing so, it always threatens a logic of assimilation that pays insignificant attention to the demands of the “other.” And this then, might be the force of Nietzsche’s desire for contemporary critical theory: it unleashes the ongoing possibility of a counter-tempo to the rhythm and measure of both liberal and late capitalist desire. Within a culturally dominant form of thought unable to imagine the temporal other of *its* time, this thinking cultivates an attentiveness to the political-ideological effects of tempo itself.

But this temporal interruption is suggestive of how we encounter “others” as ethical subjects within the metapolitical space that we occupy. Habermas’s liberal meta-

politics tends to proceed by recasting the demand of otherness into terms that would bring the other's thinking into line with its own ideal procedural assumptions.

Within the general ambit of a liberal ethos of negotiation, we have sought to insinuate a way of thinking, speaking and hearing that extends the capacity of liberalism to hear the other by complicating the liberal faith in transparency, symmetry, and dialectical reconciliation. The heterotopian interruption of liberal meta-political utopian spaces does not mean that we need to forget our desire for the more just and more rational political world marked out by those spaces. But though we need to re-member the symmetrical regulative ideal of a discursively negotiated consensus, we also need to orient our political practice towards an ethic of hearing an/other who remains alterior to our given subject positions. We must, in other words, attend to the ways in which feminism's heterotopian power diffracts our utopias, hollowing out the consensus that inevitably naturalizes the way we go about living our lives. This essay has not sought to repudiate either Rawls or Habermas's efforts at imagining the principles of fairness that would undergird a more rational and more democratic political future. Rather, it has sought, in pursuing the question of critical theory in relation to the insights of a Nietzschean inspired feminism, to enlarge the thinking of a discourse ethics by addressing the question of motivation strained out of liberal political theory in its effort to safeguard the space of neutral judgment. For the question of the other draws thinking towards a seemingly insoluble paradox: to think the other of our thought (and the other of our ethical encounters) is to deprive this radical irruption of thought its singularity. "In thinking it as such, in recognizing it, one misses it. One reappropriates it for oneself, one

deposes of it, one misses it, or rather one misses (the) missing (of) it, which, as concerns the other, always amounts to the same.”⁴⁰⁷

But for a male who seeks to think about the place of feminism in a post-utopian politics, as for the critical theorist working through his or her role in the articulation of social practice, it is this “missing” of utopia, this longing and this mis-aim, that is precisely the point. This is not to deny, in any way, the difficult and ongoing work that is necessary for building a family, or for deciding whether, where and against whom to fight our wars. It is, however, to suggest something quite necessary, in terms of the ideal articulated here, for how we go about the process of creating political solidarity.⁴⁰⁸ The questions posed here, then, are not meant or destined “to be solved or resolved, definitively, one way or the other, by some skillful and clever theoretician, but” rather are meant to stand as “more or less permanent aporias that block our way, that divert and detour us, that cost us time, even as they give us the time of sexual difference.”⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁷ Jacques Derrida, “Tympan,” trans. By Alan Bass, in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), xi – xii.

⁴⁰⁸ See Foucault, “Polemics, Politics, and Problemizations: An Interview,” in *The Foucault Reader*, 385

⁴⁰⁹ John D. Caputo, “Derrida, Drucilla Cornell, and the Dance of Gender,” in *Derrida and Feminism: Recasting the Question of Woman*, Edited by Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson, and Emily Zakin (New York: Routledge, 1997), 143.

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Education

PhD	The Pennsylvania State University	2001, Political Science
ABD	The Pennsylvania State University	1998, Political Science
MA	Virginia Polytechnical and State University.	1996, Political Science
BA	Virginia Commonwealth University.	1993, Political Science
BA	University of Richmond	1985, English Literature

Dissertation: “Critical Desire” and the Feminist Other of Critical Theory

Master’s Thesis: The Theory of Communicative Action and the Aesthetic Moment: Jürgen Habermas and the (neo)Nietzschean Challenge, 1996, Virginia Tech

Conference Papers

2001	“Rationality and the Sustainable Environment: Habermas and Land-Use on Cape May,” Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association
2000	“Liberal Meta-politics and the Heterotopian Space of the Feminist Other,” Invited Paper for Conference on “Morality and its Other(s),” Albion College
1999	“Nietzsche, Marx, and ‘Critical Desire,’” Annual Meeting of the Northeast Political Science Association
1999	“Democracy and the Challenge of Scientific Expertise in Environmental Policy,” Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association
1998	“Totality and Difference: Feminism as Post-utopian Critical Thought,” Annual Meeting of the Northeast Political Science Association
1997	“The Eternal Feminine and Heterotopian Feminism: Towards an Ethics of Desire” Annual Meeting of the Northeast Political Science Association