A NEW LANGUAGE FOR FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY

FEMINISM, POSTMODERNISM, AND THE

LINGUISTIC TURN

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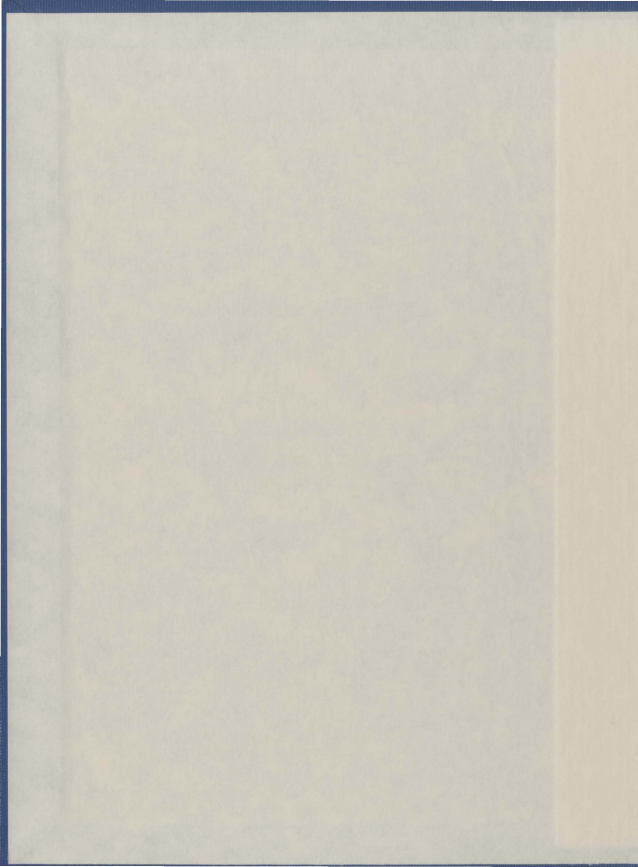Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Linguistic Turn
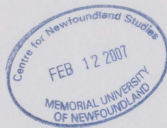
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Abstract

This thesis seeks to consider the potential that an analysis of the feminist-postmodernist debate in light of the linguistic turn may hold. To date, very few feminist theorists have directly engaged with the linguistic turn, even though this most recent revolution in philosophical thought has drastic implications for theory itself, and more importantly, for theory that seeks to influence or describe political engagement. In Chapter One, I begin by outlining the significance of the linguistic turn in the development of the postmodern agenda. I then explore the difficult terrain of the tense relationship between feminism and postmodernism in Chapter Two. Finally, in Chapter Three, I critically analyse the way in which viewing the feminist-postmodernist debate in light of the imperatives of the linguistic turn can help to ease the tensions that have clouded this relationship from its very outset. By examining three major aspects of postmodernism upon which feminist theorists concentrate – the subject, history, and metaphysics – I attempt to locate where each theorist is positioned in relation to both the linguistic turn and postmodernism. I conclude that, even though contemporary feminist theory works within the horizon of the linguistic turn, many feminist theorists have not embraced the imperatives that come along with it. Indeed, many feminist theorists who advocate an alliance with postmodernism, still retain vestiges of representational knowledge within their philosophical systems, which is incompatible with taking the linguistic turn. I end by considering the epistemological options that are available after the demise of the episteme of representation, arguing that any feminist theory that seeks to influence or describe feminist political action, must maintain an epistemological basis.

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INTRODUCTION

In *Situating the Self*, Benhabib writes,

> Why is this question concerning the identity and future and maybe
> the possibility of philosophy of interest to feminists? Can feminist
> theory not flourish without getting embroiled in the arcane debate
> about the end or transformation of philosophy? The inclination of
> the majority of feminist theorists at the present is to argue that we
> can side-step this question; even if we do not want to ignore it, we
> must not be committed to answer it one way or another.[1]

However, while it may be possible to avoid this 'arcane debate,' it seems to be the case

that many feminist theorists have indeed jumped in with both feet, typically landing

decisively on one side or the other. This thesis explores the discussion among feminist

theorists regarding the end or transformation of philosophy. This discussion is infused

with new flavour by feminist theorists, who ask: what implications does the postmodern

turn hold for feminist political practice? In other words, what is the practical fallout of

such a dramatic theoretical shift? There can be no question that traditional (liberal and

radical) feminist theory is couched within a modern framework. However, the theoretical

demands of postmodernism, and the practical demands of cultural feminism have led to a

significant amount of controversy among the ranks of feminists.

In order to lend focus to my argument, I have chosen to concentrate on six

authors, whose work comprises "Feminism As Against Epistemology?", Part I of the

anthology *Feminism/Postmodernism*.[2] In this collection of essays, Nancy Fraser and

Linda Nicholson, Jane Flax, Christine Di Stefano, Sandra Harding, and Seyla Benhabib

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[1] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics, (New York: Routledge, 1992) 224.

[2] Feminism/Postmodernism, ed. Linda J. Nicholson. (New York: Routledge, 1990)

enter into discussions about the relationship between feminism and postmodernism, specifically attending to the implications that the demise of the modern philosophical project may hold for feminist theory and politics. All of these theorists note (or at least imply) that the relationship is chiefly characterized by ambivalence, yet make an attempt to define the proper location of feminist theory, whether it be 'after philosophy,' or 'after the transformation of philosophy.'

It should also be noted that, because of the practical limitations of this work, I have chosen to explore the feminist reaction to two particular postmodernists – Jean-Francois Lyotard and Richard Rorty – and the particular line of argumentation that they support, that is, their dissatisfaction with modern philosophy, understood as a metanarrative or as a discourse of legitimation. This dissatisfaction includes three dimensions of which I take specific note, namely, the critiques of the self, of history, and of metaphysics. Not only do these three dimensions figure significantly in the postmodern critique of modern philosophy, but they are also the central points that create tension among feminist theorists who engage in discussions regarding postmodernism.

This limitation also means that the positions of postmodern thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida are not included within this project. Although the influence of their arguments will certainly colour many aspects of my exegesis and argument, they are not explicitly addressed. Another way to understand the specificity imposed upon this thesis is to place my argument in the context of Nancy Fraser's article, *Pragmatism, Feminism, and the Linguistic Turn*, where she recasts disagreements between various feminist theorists (namely, Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell) as "disputes over

the most fruitful way for feminists of making the linguistic turn."[3] She presents us with three

> 'party-line' alternatives: 1) a Habermassian perspective oriented to the validity claims implicit in intersubjective communication, which are held to ground a discourse ethics and a procedural conception of democratic publicity (Benhabib); 2) a Foucauldian perspective oriented to a plurality of contingent, historically specific, power-laden discursive regimes that construct various subject positions from which innovation is possible (Butler); and 3) a Lacanian/Derridean perspective oriented to a masculine, phallogocentric symbolic order that suppresses the feminine while dissimulating its own groundlessness.[4]

In this paper, I am interested primarily in the first of these alternatives, and the debate that deals explicitly with Benhabib's concern regarding political action within a democracy.

Thus, I seek to open up a dialogue in order to determine the potential that an analysis of the feminist-postmodernist debate in light of the linguistic turn may hold. What I hope to reveal is that those feminist theorists who advocate an alliance with postmodernism often do not go far enough. In some cases, they have made the linguistic turn, but wrongfully equate this move with taking up a postmodern position. In other cases, those feminist theorists who advocate an alliance with postmodernism construct theories that rely on an appropriation of representational knowledge.

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[3] Nancy Fraser, "Pragmatism, Feminism, and the Linguistic Turn," Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange. (New York: Routledge, 1995) 158.
[4] Fraser, "Pragmatism, Feminism, and the Linguistic Turn," 158.

CHAPTER ONE

THE LINGUISTIC TURN AND POSTMODERNISM

*We should not try to have a successor subject to
epistemology, but rather try to free ourselves from
the notion that philosophy must center around
the discovery of a permanent framework for inquiry.*
Richard Rorty, <u>Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature</u> (380)

Introduction

Chapter One seeks to accomplish two things: 1. To identify and define the linguistic turn, and 2. To demonstrate how the linguistic turn laid the groundwork for postmodernism. The broader context in which these goals are located is to show that any debate regarding postmodernism would be well-served by an understanding of the central role played by the linguistic turn in the development of the postmodern agenda. In order to demonstrate the importance of the linguistic turn, I will begin by outlining, in very broad strokes, the epistemological enterprise that was the focus of the modern philosophical project. Second, I will outline three lines of critique of the modern epistemological project[5], paying specific attention to the third of these – the critique of the modern concept of the sign – which culminates in the linguistic turn. Finally, by examining the positions of two of the leading proponents of postmodernism – Jean-Francois Lyotard and Richard Rorty – I will demonstrate the way in which the new philosophical method introduced by the linguistic turn laid the groundwork for the postmodern agenda.

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[5] I have taken these from Seyla Benhabib's essay "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," which is found in her collection of essays entitled <u>Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics</u>. (New York: Routledge, 1992)

1.1   The Modern Episteme of Representation

The implementation of the Cartesian method of doubt proved to be a transformative power in the history of philosophy. This method sprang from Rene Descartes' desire to overcome the errors of his philosophical predecessors, and was designed to answer one specific question: 'What can I know with certainty?' Descartes' conclusion was *Cogito ergo sum* – I think, therefore I am. With this declaration, Descartes demonstrated that it could be known, with certainty that the self as pure, thinking substance, exists, even though the existence of the external world could plausibly be doubted. This Cartesian self is a non-material substance that underlies all mental states and activities. It is "a thing which doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses and which also imagines and feels."[6] This non-material substance, *res cogitans*, is set over and against the material universe, *res extensa*.

The problem which then beset the Cartesian system was the co-existence of thought and extension. Indeed, how could these two disparate substances be connected? The dualism of mind and body became a central concern of philosophy after Descartes, and modern philosophical inquiry turned to the question of the causal relation between these two vastly different and independent substances. The emergence of this question reveals that the Cartesian subjective turn also instigated the epistemological turn. Richard Rorty succinctly phrases the issue as follows: "The idea of a discipline devoted to 'the nature, origin, and limits of knowledge' – the textbook definition of

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[6] Samuel Enoch Stumpf, <u>Philosophy: History & Problems</u>, fourth edition. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1971) 243.

'epistemology' – required a field of study called "the human mind," and that field of study was what Descartes had created."[7]

Descartes' dualism, spurred into existence by the Cartesian method of doubt, created a philosophical milieu that dealt with the possibility of knowledge about the external world. In order to answer this question, it was necessary to clarify the connection between subject and object. Debate on this front gave rise to two distinct camps, the rationalists and the empiricists. The former argued that *a priori* reason was the unique path to knowledge, and that knowledge was obtained through intuition and deduction. The latter argued that the concepts or beliefs that constituted knowledge were derived from *a posteriori* experience, and thus that experience played the primary role in human knowledge. In either case, philosophy's goal to determine what constituted knowledge was henceforth the defining feature of modern thought.

Questions of knowledge and how it was obtained formed the horizon of modern philosophical inquiry. But what system was devised to allow the subject to gain knowledge about the external, material world? The solution that was provided by modern philosophers, and that so fully captured the modern philosophical mind, was the episteme of representation. According to representationalism, the subject does not have direct access to the external world. Thus, in order to gain knowledge of this inaccessible external reality, objects must be represented internally, in the subject's consciousness. In other words, if X is an object in the world, and X is accurately represented in the

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7 Richard Rorty, <u>Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature</u>. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979) 140.

subject's consciousness, then the subject knows X. Because the subject can know, with certainty, that which is represented internally, this is the only route to knowledge. In short, the episteme of representation provides an understanding of "*knowledge as representation*, according to which the subject stands over against an independent world of objects that it can more or less accurately represent."[8]

Within this new context, "Philosophy has the privileged role of determining the criteria for judging that our representations are adequate to reality."[9] Thus, philosophy became the basis upon which the presuppositions of other sciences were examined, and sought to articulate the essential rules that the empirical sciences were to follow in order to claim that they had discovered truths. As Rorty states, "The eventual demarcation of philosophy from science was made possible by the notion that philosophy's core was "theory of knowledge," a theory distinct from the sciences because it was their *foundation*."[10] That is, philosophy's role as the adjudicator of knowledge claims cemented its foundational status. Rorty summarizes the modern epistemological project as follows:

> To know is to represent accurately what is outside the mind; so to understand the possibility and nature of knowledge is to understand the way in which the mind is able to construct such representations. Philosophy's central concern is to be a general theory of representation, a theory which will divide culture up into the areas which represent reality well, those which represent it less well, and those which do not represent it at all (despite their pretense of doing so.)[11]

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[8] Kenneth Baynes, "General Introduction," After Philosophy: End or Transformation?, eds. Kenneth Baynes et. al. (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987) 4-5.

[9] Gary Gutting, "Rorty, Richard," The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, second edition, ed. Robert Audi. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 798.

[10] Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, 132.

[11] Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, 3.

Knowledge, so argue the modern philosophers, is achieved when the dualism of mind and nature is made congruous. In order to manage this dualism, representations in consciousness have to be accurately aligned with the world of objects outside of the self. When any particular set of representations are aligned, a truth is obtained. This process became the defining feature of modern philosophical inquiry. Whether empiricist or rationalist, the desire to overcome the schism between the world of thought and the world of objects was the aim and purpose of the modern episteme. Within this philosophical landscape, "knowledge is to be seen as correct representation of an independent reality. In its original form it saw knowledge as the inner depiction of an outer reality."[12] However, this epistemology was intrinsically unstable and thus exhibited a proclivity toward self-criticism. Rationalism became increasingly dogmatic, as its metaphysical speculations seemed to be beyond dispute. On the other hand, empiricism became increasingly skeptical, as what we experience, and thus know, was subjected to intense scrutiny. Thus, the divide between rationalism and empiricism grew ever more hostile, and yet neither, it seemed, could provide an adequate account of the way in which knowledge was obtained.

1.2   The Critique of the Modern Epistemological Project

The self-critical tendency of modern philosophy is most clearly demonstrated in the work of Immanuel Kant, whose admiration for the progress of science left him with

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[12]   Charles Taylor, "Overcoming Epistemology," Philosophy: End or Transformation?, eds. Kenneth Baynes et. al.. (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987) 466.

serious concerns about the adequacy of either rationalism or empiricism in explaining how knowledge was obtained. Thus, Kant sought to develop an epistemological system that could explain the conditions for the possibility of knowledge, as well as provide justification for the continuation of science. According to a commentator, Kant hypothesized that "every human being, having the faculty of thought, inevitably thinks about things in accordance with the natural structure of the mind."[13] In other words, Kant embraces subjectivity as the grounds of knowledge, insisting that the mind, through the categories of the understanding, imposes rules of organization and synthesis upon the world. Thus, the mind becomes an active agent in the production of knowledge, and universal subjectivity becomes a necessary condition for the possibility of a world of objects.

Kantian epistemology places strict limits on what can be known. Kant concludes that metaphysical knowledge is not possible because we can only gain knowledge of that which can be experienced. Thus, we can only know the phenomenal (the world as it is experienced), while the noumenal (intelligible reality) cannot be known. In other words, "there is a reality external to us that exists independently of us but that we can know only as it appears to us and is organized by us."[14] While we can *think* about metaphysical concepts, such as the self, the cosmos, or God, it is not possible to gain knowledge of these things. As a result, Kant's epistemology goes beyond the traditional subject-object dualism of modern philosophy, but retains vestiges of dualistic thought insofar as he

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[13] Samuel Enoch Stumpf, Philosophy: History & Problems, fourth edition. (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1971) 307.

[14] Stumpf, Philosophy: History & Problems, 309.

imposes a new, higher-order dualism, between the phenomenal and the noumenal.

Within Kant's philosophy, the subject becomes a transcendental, self-conscious unity, which functions as a necessary condition for the possibility of knowledge. He argues that "the unity of our experience must imply a unity of the self, for unless there was a unity between the several operations of the mind, there could be no knowledge of experience."[15] However, because we do not directly experience the self as a unity, we must rely on that which is implied by our experience. That is, through pure reason, we formulate a concept of the self as a unified whole. Thus, the Cartesian subject is divided in two – the phenomenal self, which is ruled by natural necessity and can be known, and the transcendental self, which is free and creative, but cannot be known.

Kantian epistemology possessed a residual dualism that raised questions about the way in which the phenomenal and transcendental could co-exist. This was taken up as a major focus of post-Kantian critical discussion, allowing the critique of epistemology to continue unabated. The role of the transcendental self, and the distinction between this self and the phenomenal self, resulted in the construction of a rigorous critique of the subject. Kant's emphasis on the impact of consciousness in shaping reality led to a more robust critique of the object. Finally, Kant's elaborate epistemological system, which retained a dualism that set the transcendental self apart from phenomenal reality, allowed room for the development of a critique of the sign. These three lines of critique – of the modern concept of the subject, of the modern concept of the object, and of the modern

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[15] Stumpf, Philosophy: History & Problems, 308.

concept of the sign, are explicated by Seyla Benhabib, and form the content of the remainder of section 1.2.

1.2.1 The Critique of the Modern Concept of the Subject

The subject, according to modern thought, is "atomistic and autonomous, disengaged and disembodied, and, at least on some views, potentially and ideally self-transparent."[16] That is, the pre-Kantian subject is an autonomous, rational being, who is set apart from and can know the world. Kant's critical philosophy instigates a line of inquiry that questions both of these central features of the modern subject. First, Kant limits the rational powers of the subject such that knowledge cannot be gained through reason, but only through experience. Secondly, Kant brings the self and world together, insisting that they are mutually implicatory, rather than directly opposed.

While Kant's critical philosophy placed strict limits on reason, the Post-Kantian critique of the modern concept of the subject calls into question whether any sort of pure, rational deliberation is possible. Postmodern critics argue that the self is constituted not only by conscious, rational thought, but by unconscious, irrational impulses as well. Thus, the Cartesian self is no longer able to accumulate clear and distinct ideas, nor is the Kantian self capable of pure, rational speculation of the sort that leads to an understanding of the self as a unified whole. Rather, the subject is "controlled by desires, needs and forces whose effects upon it shape both the contents of its clear and distinct ideas, as well as its capacity to organize them."[17]

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[16] Baynes, "General Introduction," After Philosophy: End or Transformation?, 4.
[17] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 207.

Postmodern critics also challenge the idea that the modern self is disengaged and disembodied. Consciousness, the critics argue, is social in nature rather than autonomously rational. Both thought and action are coloured by cultural and historical influences, and a priori judgements are not possible. Moreover, to oppose mind and body is an inadequate presupposition. The two are inextricably linked, and this relationship necessarily alters the structure of knowledge as conceived by modern thinkers. Thus, the modern subject is replaced with "the view of an active, producing, fabricating humanity, creating the conditions of objectivity by forming nature through its own activity."[18] The self becomes a "social, historical or linguistic artifact, not a noumenal or transcendental Being."[19] In other words, the Cartesian self, transformed into the transcendental self by Kant's critical philosophy, is now reduced to the phenomenal self only. That is, the creative power of Kant's transcendental self is gathered within a historically situated, empirical being.

1.2.2   The Critique of the Modern Concept of the Object

Pre-Kantian modern philosophy understands the object as that which is the unchanging 'real' that exists independently of, and can be known by, the modern subject. Contrary to this view, Kant argues that reality is formed through the active agency of the mind, and that the self cannot access reality except through the categories of the understanding which are brought to the given. Thus, while we are able to know the phenomenal world, we do not have access to the noumenal, or 'things-in-themselves.'

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[18]   Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 207.
[19]   Flax, Thinking Fragments, 32.

Rather, noumenal reality – the world as a totality – is posited by pure reason or metaphysical speculation.

Postmodern critics follow Kant in claiming that the object is not independent of the observer. However, critics wish to avoid the higher-order, transcendental dualism that Kant employs to resolve the problem of skepticism at the phenomenal level. In order to do so, this critique begins by asserting that the external world is a web of relations that includes all objects in the world, as well as the supposedly sovereign self. The Kantian epistemological framework, they argue, overlooks "the background conditions that enable entities to show up as counting or mattering in some specific way in the first place."[20] While Kant opened the door for this criticism by insisting that we impose our way of knowing upon the world, postmodern critics go one step further in arguing that we also infuse the world with specific significance in accordance with our goals and projects.

Moreover, postmodern critics insist that Kant, insofar as his transcendental critique of reason seeks to justify the conclusions and continuation of Newtonian science, contributes to the tradition of creating a philosophical system through which the world is designed to be controlled. According to this view, the ideal of modern rationality is based on the domination of nature and other human beings. Western reason, these critics

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[20] Charles B. Guignon, "Heidegger, Martin," The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, second edition, ed. Robert Audi. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 370. To fully investigate Heidegger's phenomenological criticism of Kant is surely outside the scope of this thesis. For my purposes here, it should suffice to note that Heidegger argues that traditional theories of human existence tend to focus on "our ways of existing when we are engaged in theorizing and detached reflection," rather than our "average everydayness." (Guignon, 371) Because of this tendency, we end up with a subject-object distinction, which doesn't account for the totality of human experience, including the way we interact with objects in the world. Because Kant's transcendental dualism is constructed without taking into account this "average everydayness," it is therefore inadequate.

argue, "imposes homogeneity and identity upon the heterogeneity of material,"[21] allowing it to become more easily navigable, and hence more easily dominated. Ultimately, the critique of the modern concept of the object suggests that there is no independent world of objects, and that the modern creation of an external reality, set apart from the knowing subject, is an abstraction designed to create a dominatory relation between the two sides of the dichotomy.

1.2.3   The Critique of the Modern Concept of the Sign

Finally, it is the third critique – the critique of the modern concept of the sign – that, of the three, provides the most profound critique of the episteme of representation. The modern concept of the sign holds a specific position within the modern episteme of representation. A collection of signs, or a language, is used to either represent external objects, or express the inner states of the subject. Language, therefore, is a medium between internal and external, thought and extension, subject and object. Richard Rorty employs the metaphor of 'mirroring nature' to describe the state of modern epistemology. He explains it in the following way:

> The picture which holds traditional philosophy captive is that of the mind as a great mirror, containing various representations – some accurate, some not – and capable of being studied by pure, nonempirical methods. Without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself. Without this latter notion, the strategy common to Descartes and Kant – getting more accurate representations by inspecting, repairing, and polishing the mirror, so to speak – would not have made sense.[22]

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[21]   Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 208.
[22]   Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, 12.

The critique of the modern concept of the sign emphasizes the public character of language in opposition to the private character as endorsed by the representational view of knowledge. Within the episteme of representation, language is private in the sense that signs are representations that are located in an individual's consciousness. With the critique of the sign, there is a "move in the analysis of language from the private to the public, from consciousness to sign, [and] from the individual word to a system of relations among linguistic signs."[23] So, rather than a collection of private signs, language is seen as a public affair.

Furthermore, this critique suggests that "the object of knowledge is always already preinterpreted, situated in a scheme, part of a text, outside which there are only other texts. On the other hand, the subject of knowledge belongs to the very world it wishes to interpret."[24] It is through this claim that the critique of the sign draws into itself the critiques of the subject and object. Given the importance of the subject-object dichotomy in modern thought, the deterioration of this dualism, through the critique of the modern concept of the sign, holds profound implications for the episteme of representation. The rejection of representational knowledge is the strongest impetus in the paradigmatic shift from modernism to postmodernism. Because the defining feature of modern philosophy was its epistemological focus, the rejection of the modern theory of knowledge was groundbreaking, to say the least.

The critique of the sign – and ultimately, the linguistic turn – is the chief

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[23] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," <u>Situating the Self</u>, 208.
[24] Baynes, " General Introduction," 5.

motivator in the transformation from the modern episteme to postmodernism. Given the importance of the critique of the sign and its culmination in the linguistic turn, it is clear that this movement requires further examination.

1.3   The Linguistic Turn

The linguistic turn ushered in a new style of philosophical methodology – linguistic philosophy. This new methodology, which has taken hold of the philosophical mind since the middle of the century, is "the view that philosophical problems are problems which may be solved (or dissolved) either by reforming language or by understanding more about the language we presently use."[25]   In other words, philosophical problems will no longer be solved by further investigation into the conditions for the possibility of knowledge. As Moritz Schlick states, "the fate of all 'philosophical problems' is this: Some of them will disappear by being shown to be mistakes and misunderstandings of our language and the others will be found to be ordinary scientific questions in disguise. These remarks, I think, determine the whole future of philosophy."[26]

The linguistic turn is particularly notable because it was a methodological revolt, rather than a continuation of traditional methodology. Similar to the Cartesian subjective and epistemological turns, the linguistic turn provided a completely new focus for, and way of doing, philosophy. Like all methodological revolutions, the linguistic turn began

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[25]   Richard Rorty, "Introduction: Metaphilosophical Difficulties of Linguistic Philosophy," The Linguistic Turn, ed. Richard Rorty. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967) 3.
[26]   Moritz Schlick, "The Future of Philosophy," The Linguistic Turn, ed. Richard Rorty. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967) 51.

as the search for a neutral standpoint. The desire to overcome the presuppositions held by the prelinguistic philosophers pushed thinkers of the early 1900s to develop their new method of linguistic philosophy. Indeed, this desire is the machinery that typically drives philosophy forward, and by which new issues arise for debate. The presuppositions that the linguistic philosophers sought to reveal and overcome included, first and foremost, the idea of knowledge as representation. In so doing, philosophy after the linguistic turn focused primarily on the examination of language.

After the turn, linguistic philosophy followed two major directions, Ideal Language Philosophy (ILP) and Ordinary Language Philosophy (OLP). The first (ILP) was initiated by Russell, carried on by the Vienna Circle, and later influenced the logical positivist movement. The central tenet of ILP dictates that philosophical problems can be solved (or dissolved) by properly representing them within a system of notation that requires the structure of expressions to mirror the structure of that which is represented. An Ideal Language would be logically perfect, allowing no room for vagueness or ambiguity. Any philosophical problem, according to Russell, can be restated in (Fregeian) logical form, at which point it will be possible to determine that the problem is either not philosophical, or that it is due to logical difficulties. Philosophical problems, on this account, are not hard to solve, but rather hard to state.

Thus, logic is employed to simplify philosophical language and, consequently, philosophical problems as well. Ultimately, any sentence that is not logically perfect, or cannot be placed into a system that is logically coherent, is rendered meaningless. Only formal logic has the power to uncover whether a sentence has meaning or not. According

to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, "the structure of language reveals the structure of the world [and] every meaningful sentence is analyzable into atomic constituents that designate the fine-grained constituents of reality." [27] However, while ILP is revolutionary in that it turns to language to solve philosophical problems, the ILP understanding of language does not move beyond the modern ideal of representational knowledge. ILP seeks simply to clarify the way in which language 'hooks onto' the world. It is only with OLP that language stops being understood as a medium, and therefore signals the demise of the modern episteme.

The second branch of linguistic philosophy, (OLP), opposes itself to ILP in that these philosophers focus not on the logical form of language, but on the ordinary, everyday usage of language instead. More fundamentally, OLP philosophers accuse ILP of maintaining a representational view of language. OLP philosophers argue that "long-standing philosophical muddles [result] from a natural tendency, when pursuing philosophical theses, to be misled by the grammatical form of sentences in which those questions were posed."[28] Inspired by Wittgenstein's later work, *Philosophical Investigations*, in which he renounces his Tractarian view, OLP philosophers[29] contend that concepts are fixed by linguistic practice. It is only when concepts are removed from their original language games that philosophical quandaries arise. It is when philosophers are 'bewitched' by language and begin using words such as 'truth' or

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[27] John Heil, "analytic philosophy," The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, second edition, ed. Robert Audi. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 26.
[28] Heil, "analytic philosophy," The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, 26.
[29] Ordinary Language Philosophy is most closely associated with the names of Wittgenstein, Wisdom, Ryle, Malcolm, and Austin.

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'knowledge' philosophically, that muddles emerge. For the Ordinary Language philosopher, there is nothing beyond language to which words are intended to correspond. Because of this, the meanings of words and rules for their use are no longer fixed, but dynamic, capable of evolving or being transformed.

However, a new methodology such as OLP can be difficult to defend. "Since philosophical method is in itself a philosophical topic, ...every philosophical revolutionary is open to the charge of circularity or to the charge of having begged the question."[30] How then, can linguistic philosophy be defended against its opponents? Quite simply, the most common response is the pragmatic one, which involves "linguistic philosophers pointing with pride to their own linguistic reforms and/or descriptions of language, and saying, 'Look, no problems!'."[31]

Regardless of these difficulties, OLP's emphasis on the role of language in use was taken up by two of the leading proponents of postmodernism, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Richard Rorty. Linguistic philosophers "do not think that when we say something we must necessarily be expressing a view about a subject. We might just be *saying something* – participating in a conversation rather than contributing to an inquiry. Perhaps saying things is not always saying how things are."[32] On this view, understanding language as communication rather than representation, entertaining the possibility that philosophical problems disappear when one examines language in use, is to effectively eliminate the episteme of representation.

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[30] Rorty, "Introduction," <u>The Linguistic Turn</u>, 1-2.
[31] Rorty, "Introduction," <u>The Linguistic Turn</u>, 3.
[32] Rorty, <u>Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature</u>, 371.

So what becomes of philosophy if traditional epistemology is so radically undermined? Indeed, "it is difficult to imagine that any activity would be entitled to bear the name "philosophy" if it had nothing to do with knowledge."[33] Lyotard and Rorty both provide similar answers to this question, which amount to the claim that maintaining a conversation can be considered a sufficient aim of philosophy. If wisdom can be understood as the ability to sustain a conversation, then we have not necessarily reached the end of philosophy, but rather redefined its purposes and processes. Ultimately, their postmodern positions contend that "philosophers' moral concern should be with continuing the conversation of the West, rather than with insisting upon a place for the traditional problems of modern philosophy within that conversation."[34]

1.4   The Postmodern Agenda

To draw out the connection between the linguistic turn and postmodernism, allow me to further explore the domain of postmodernism, including a more thorough investigation of the postmodern agendas of both Lyotard and Rorty. In their introduction to *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?*, Baynes et. al. point out that all postmodern thinkers have made the 'linguistic turn.' However, this does not necessarily imply that postmodernism is a coherent, clearly circumscribed set of beliefs or ideals. The attempt to define the limits of postmodernism has caused philosophers to debate the usefulness of philosophy – some calling for its end, others calling for a transformation of its practices.

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[33]   Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, 357.
[34]   Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, 394.

Indeed, "The word 'postmodern' is...characterized, from its very inception, by an ambiguity. On the one hand it is seen as a historical period; on the other it is simply a desire, a mood which looks to the future to redeem the present."[35]

While all postmodern thinkers have made the linguistic turn and share modern thought as a common enemy, they do not necessarily approach the issues in the same way, and this has certainly lent an air of confusion to the movement. Yet there are a few characteristics that can be identified as distinctly postmodern.

> Postmodern philosophy is...usefully regarded as a complex cluster concept that includes the following: an anti- (or post-) epistemological standpoint; anti-essentialism, anti-realism, anti-foundationalism; opposition to transcendental arguments and transcendental standpoints; rejection of the picture of knowledge as accurate representation; rejection of truth as correspondence to reality; rejection of final vocabularies, i.e., rejection of principles, distinctions, and descriptions that are thought to be unconditionally binding for all times, persons, and places; and a suspicion of grand narratives, metanarratives of the sort perhaps best illustrated by dialectical materialism.[36]

However, these are clearly all negative descriptions, and we are no closer to understanding the positive postmodern agenda. The question remains: with what does the postmodernist seek to replace Enlightenment epistemology? If we no longer study the 'foundations of knowledge,' what do we study? Where does the denial of epistemology lead? While the answer to this question varies amongst postmodern thinkers, Lyotard, who emphasizes the 'agonistics' of language, and Rorty, who argues for rhetoric over reason, can be usefully considered as significant contributors to the postmodern movement.

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[35] Baynes, "General Introduction," After Philosophy: End or Transformation?, 2.
[36] Bernd Magnus, "postmodern," The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, second edition, ed. Robert Audi. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 725.

1.4.1   Jean-Francois Lyotard: The Agonistics of Language

In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard defines the term postmodern as an "incredulity toward metanarratives,"[37] which "resides constantly at the heart of the modern, challenging those totalizing and comprehensive master narratives...that serve to legitimate its practices."[38]   Under modernity, philosophical metanarratives are self-legitimizing in that they provide the end toward which the philosophical method is aimed. Metanarratives define both the end and the means of obtaining it.   These discourses of legitimation, such as "the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth,"[39] are thus used to define truth and knowledge.   In turn, philosophers can employ these notions in order to become a "hero of knowledge [who] works toward a good ethico-political end – universal peace."[40]   Lyotard contends that we must "refrain from totalizing claims in favour of recognizing the specificity and singularity of events."[41]   In other words, legitimation must be local and context-specific.   There can be no universal set of rules, such as those found in metanarratives, to which one can appeal.   Rather, courses of action, including speech, are pragmatically determined, and dependent upon the context in which they are defined.

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[37]   Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition," After Philosophy: End or Transformation?, eds. Kenneth Baynes et al.. (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987) 74.
[38]   Alan D. Schrift, "Lyotard, Jean-Francois," The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, second edition, ed. Robert Audi. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 523.
[39]   Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition," After Philosophy: End or Transformation?, 73.
[40]   Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition," After Philosophy: End or Transformation?, 73.
[41]   Schrift, "Lyotard, Jean-Francois," The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, 523.

Legitimation, then, "can only spring from [one's] own linguistic practice and communicational interaction."[42] That is, our goals and the means by which they are obtained are specific to any particular language game. However, Lyotard appeals to the 'agonistics of language,' claiming that we employ an "argumentative, discursive practice...to speak is to fight, in the sense of playing."[43] He defies the idea that we seek consensus of the sort proposed by Jurgen Habermas,[44] because this still assumes that "humanity as a collective (universal) subject seeks its common emancipation through the regularization of the 'moves' permitted in all language games and that the legitimacy of any statement resides in its contributing to that emancipation."[45] It is absurd, he argues, to find any 'metaprescriptives' common to the wide array of language games. Rather, language games are "heteromorphous, subject to heterogeneous sets of pragmatic rules."[46]

When a political or aesthetic judgement is required, but there is no common rule to which one can appeal, Lyotard invokes the *différend*, which allows a dispute that defies resolution to be posed in such a way that neither party's claim is delegitimized. *Différends* arise when there is a dispute between "parties [that] operate within radically heterogeneous language games so incommensurate that no consensus can be reached on

[42] Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition," After Philosophy: End or Transformation?, 87.
[43] Seyla Benhabib, "Epistemologies of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder to Jean-Francois Lyotard," Feminism/Postmodernism, ed. Linda J. Nicholson. (New York: Routledge, 1990) 113.
[44] Habermas "argues for an intersubjective notion of practical reason and discursive procedure for the justification of universal norms," which can then be used toward the goal of emancipation. From James Bohman, "Habermas, Jurgen," The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, second edition, ed. Robert Audi. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 359.
[45] Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition," After Philosophy: End or Transformation?, 88.
[46] Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition," After Philosophy: End or Transformation?, 88.

principles or rules that could govern how their dispute might be settled."[47] Thus, Lyotard's postmodern position relies on legitimation that is specific to any given language game, in opposition to the philosophical metanarratives that characterize the modern period. Furthermore, these language games are constantly evolving; subject to pragmatic rules, and no others.

1.4.2 Richard Rorty: Metaphor[48]

Like Lyotard, Rorty emphasizes the pragmatic evolution of language. He argues that we must "abandon this project [of representationalism] and, with it, traditional pretensions to a privileged cognitive role for philosophy."[49] Moreover, he "sees no point in seeking a non-representationalist basis for the justification or the truth of our knowledge claims. It is enough to accept as justified beliefs those on which our epistemic community agrees and to use 'true' as an honorific term for beliefs that we see as 'justified to the hilt.' ."[50] In other words, Rorty sides with Lyotard, in the claim that legitimation resides within a specific language game. We have no need to look beyond our epistemic community to determine that which constitutes knowledge. How, then, does one decide between competing claims within a community? Taking his cue from Nietzsche, Rorty points to the power of rhetoric and metaphor. In order to gain

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[47] Schrift, "Lyotard, Jean-Francois," The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, 523.
[48] In identifying Richard Rorty as a "significant contributor to the postmodern movement," (p. 21) I am conceiving of postmodernism rather broadly. In many instances, Rorty is defined as a 'neo-pragmatist' or a 'contextual-pragmatist' (Benhabib). However, many of the feminist theorists whose work I employ throughout this thesis, namely, Fraser and Nicholson, Di Stefano, Harding, as well as others prominent theorists, including Susan Bordo in "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism" and Nancy Hartsock in "Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?", all identify Rorty as a postmodern thinker. Magnus also refers to Rorty in his entry 'postmodernism,' in the Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, 725.
[49] Gutting, "Rorty, Richard," The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, 798.
[50] Gutting, "Rorty, Richard," The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, 798.

knowledge, language constantly evolves according to pragmatic rules. The machinery that propels language forward is, according to Rorty, metaphor.

All innovation, Rorty asserts, is born out of metaphor. We must agree, he contends, "that the world does not provide us with any criterion of choice between alternative metaphors, that we can only compare languages or metaphors with one another, not with something beyond language called 'fact.'."[51] His evolutionary approach attempts to show that "our language and our culture are as much a contingency, as much a result of thousands of small mutations finding niches...as are the orchids and the anthropoids."[52] Thus, if we find that certain segments of our language do not serve us properly, then we will create new metaphors that help us to deal with the world. Indeed, "To say that one's previous language was inappropriate for dealing with some segment of the world...is just to say that one is now, having learned a new language, able to handle that segment more easily."[53]

Rorty believes that, "To say that the world is out there, that it is not our creation, is to say, with common sense, that most things in space and time are the effects of causes which do not including human mental states."[54] Thus, our language is designed to navigate this world. Over time, we slowly adjust our language so that it helps us to function more appropriately in the world we inhabit. In this way, the goal of language is not to match or accurately represent reality - this only works if one subscribes to the idea that language is a medium. Rather, the goal of language is to better equip language-users

[51] Richard Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 20.
[52] Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, 16.
[53] Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, 14.
[54] Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, 5.

to function in their world. Rorty believes that no vocabulary is ever final, and that the terms used to describe oneself and one's community are subject to change. However, the goal of creating new vocabularies is not to have them more accurately represent the world, as prescribed by modern, philosophical metanarratives. Rather, the evolution of language is pragmatically determined.

Conclusion

The role that is played by the linguistic turn in the demise of the classical episteme, and the consequent turn to postmodernism, cannot be underestimated. Lyotard's agonistics of language and Rorty's metaphor are but two examples of the overwhelming impact this new philosophical method has had on current modes of thinking. The postmodern agenda has had far-reaching implications within philosophical discourse, and beyond. One of the areas that has felt its impact most acutely has been feminist theory. Chapter Two turns toward this complex issue in an attempt to delineate the relationship between feminist theory and postmodernism.

CHAPTER 2

POSTMODERNISM AND FEMINISM

The nagging question is whether the uncertain promise
of a political linkage between feminism and
postmodernism is worth the attendant potential risks.
Christine Di Stefano, <u>Dilemmas of Difference</u> (77)

Introduction

In Chapter One, I demonstrated the role played by the linguistic turn in the development of the postmodern agenda. In Chapter Two, I will consider some of the complexities within feminist theory's relationship to postmodernism. In order to introduce this relationship, I will begin by outlining the roots of contemporary feminism in very broad strokes. Then, I will explore the feminism-postmodernism debate, illustrating the central issues from three different angles. First, I will consider the affinities of some feminist theorists for postmodernism. Second, I will discuss some feminist quarrels with postmodernism, and finally, I will look at the work of some feminist theorists who have tailored postmodern theory to suit their theoretical and socio-political purposes. From this explication, I will move to Chapter Three, which begins with an outline of the tensions revealed by these positions.

2.1   The History of Contemporary Feminisms

For the purposes of this Chapter, there are three major schools of feminist thought to consider: liberal feminism, radical feminism, and cultural feminism. These divergent schools provide a basic outline of the history of feminism's relationship to the modern philosophical project. I provide this background because these three schools mirror the

tensions inherent in recent philosophical thought. Indeed, it can be argued that the progression of feminist thought from liberal through radical and on to cultural feminism mirrors the progression in philosophy itself from modernity to postmodernism. As such, it is a very good place to begin the examination of the relationship between feminism and postmodernism.

2.1.1 Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism, although this title was only assumed later, was instigated in the eighteenth century by thinkers[55] who took as their starting point the modern ideal of universal reason. Liberal feminists point out that, within the modern philosophical system, women were designated as irrational, and thus incapable of traditional rational thought. Moreover, because the capacity for rational thought was used as the basis for granting personhood, moral agency, and that which follows from these, such as property and rights,[56] women had no justifiable claim to any of these.

The female's association with body, emotion, nature, was seen as an impediment to her ability to employ reason. Thus, liberal feminists fought – and in some cases, still fight – for recognition as individuals who possess the same type of, and comparable ability for, reason as men. Christine Di Stefano describes the liberal feminist project as follows: "Women have been unfairly excluded from the respect which they are due as

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[55] The name most commonly associated with the beginnings of liberal feminism is Mary Wollstonecraft who, in A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792), argued that women ought to be educated in a similar fashion as men, and would thus prove their ability for rational thought.

[56] In The Man of Reason: "Male" & "Female" in Western Philosophy, Genevieve Lloyd writes, "[Reason] is incorporated not just into our criteria of truth, but also into our understanding of what it is to be a person at all, of the requirements that must be met to be a good person, and of the proper relations between our status as knowers and the rest of our lives."(xviii) Lloyd's work is an excellent resource to learn more about the role of Reason in Western Philosophy. (Minnesota: Routledge, 1993)

human beings on the basis of an insidious assumption that they are less rational and more natural than men."[57] Given the chance, women would be able to prove their rationality, and those rights afforded to men could no longer be denied to the 'second sex.'

2.1.2 Radical Feminism

Instigated by the 1963 publication of *The Feminine Mystique*,[58] a second wave of feminism arose through consciousness-raising groups in the West. The radical feminism[59] that emerged from these discussions sought to determine the root cause of the oppression of women. Both politically and theoretically, radical feminists identified patriarchy as this root cause, and thus sought ways in which to undermine this societal structure. In opposition to liberal feminists, radical feminists fight against the oppression of patriarchy by problematizing reason, and seeking to revalorize the feminine. Thus, rather than affirming the modern conception of a unitary and universal reason, they emphasize a move away from reason entirely.

Radical feminists call for a revaluation of the "feminized irrational, invoking a strong notion of difference against the gender-neutral pretensions of a rationalist culture."[60] The female association with body, emotion, nature, was no longer seen as an impediment to her ability to participate as a full and equal member of society, but rather as something to be valued for its own sake. While some radical feminists insist that a

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[57] Christine Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference: Feminism, Modernity, and Postmodernism," *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson. (New York: Routledge, 1990) 67.
[58] In *The Feminine Mystique*, (1963) Betty Friedan argued that countless American women were experiencing "the problem that has no name," due, in part, to their roles as wives and mothers.
[59] Prominent radical feminist theorists and activists include Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon, Susan Brownmiller, and Mary Daly.
[60] Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," *Feminism/Postmodernism*, 67.

separate society for women must be created in order to accomplish these goals, more generally, the radical feminist project would ideally result in a society that accommodates – even celebrates – women in their feminized difference.

However, the second wave of feminism underwent a great deal of change within the short span of twenty to thirty years. In fact, we see that contemporary feminist thought through the last decades of the twentieth century underwent similar changes to those which took hundreds of years for philosophical thought to experience. While traditional modern thought "produced no self-generated practice of self-interrogation and critique of its racial, class, and gender biases...contemporary feminism has been unusually attuned to issues of exclusion and invisibility."[61] So attuned, in fact, that not long after the emergence of the second wave in the 1960s, both liberal and radical feminisms came under attack for their biases. The identification of the biases within second wave feminist thought led to the emergence of cultural feminism. The most distinguishing characteristic of cultural feminism is its conceptual shift away from essentialism and toward experience. While liberal and radical feminisms based their arguments for female liberation upon a conception of woman as an essential category, cultural feminism turned to the fragmented, empirical experience of women.

2.1.3 Cultural Feminism

Cultural feminists[62] contend that the liberal and radical feminists' search for a foundation upon which the oppression of women could be described invariably left out

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[61] Susan Bordo, "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism," Feminism/Postmodernism, ed. Linda J. Nicholson. (New York: Routledge, 1990) 141.

[62] Prominent cultural feminist theorists and activists include bell hooks, Audre Lorde, and Chandra Mohanty.

the experience of many women. Both liberal and radical feminisms were identified as too white-centered, heterosexist, and middle-class. Thus, these feminist arguments "hamper rather than promote sisterhood, since they elide differences among women and among the forms of sexism to which different women are differentially subject."[63] Therefore, because liberal and radical feminists generally fail to address the multiple axes of identity that inflect gender relations, cultural feminists try to offer a more complex understanding of identity, and thus a more complex version of feminist theory and activism.

Through the work of various cultural feminists, criticisms of mainstream feminist arguments have gained currency, and "poor and working-class women, women of color, and lesbians have finally won a wider hearing for their objections to feminist theories which fail to illuminate their lives and address their problems."[64] However, the concerns of cultural feminism not only brought out the inadequacies of liberal and radical feminist theories, but also consequently dictated the need for a new basis for feminist politics. If women's emancipation could not be gained by arguments for her rationality, or by a revaluation of the feminine, then what theory could achieve this goal?

We shall see that the cultural feminist turn away from essentialism and toward experience nudged feminist theory toward postmodernism. However, determining whether any given feminist perspective is more closely akin to modernity or to postmodernism is a challenging task. Within liberal and radical critiques, the traditional

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[63] Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism," Feminism/Postmodernism, ed. Linda J. Nicholson. (New York: Routledge, 1990) 33.

[64] Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy," Feminism/Postmodernism, 33.

concepts of truth, knowledge, power, history, self and language were called into question because of their androcentric biases. Yet the move from a call to maintain the concepts while making them more inclusive, to a call to rid ourselves of the concepts altogether is a move that requires careful investigation.

Thus, feminism remains in a relation of ambivalence to both the modern and postmodern projects. On the one hand, contemporary feminism's critique of the modern can be seen as a generating force in the transition from modernity to postmodernism. It is certainly true that "the force of postmodern critiques can perhaps best be seen in some of the challenges of feminist theory…and gender theory generally. For it is in gender theory that the conception of 'reason' itself as it has functioned in the shared philosophical tradition is redescribed as a conception that, it is often argued, is (en)gendered, patriarchal, homophobic, and deeply optional."[65] Yet on the other hand, contemporary feminist thought can be seen as a movement that has 'piggy-backed' on the postmodern cause, adopting its stance as its own. The postmodern problematization of the self, of history, and of metaphysics, has certainly been commensurate with some of feminist theory's own critical moves. However, while the matter of historical precedence is certainly worthy of consideration, it is not my intention to discuss it here. Rather, I will look at the more substantive issue of the theoretical relationship between feminist and postmodernist theories.

In order to outline the complexities of this matter, I will investigate the tense relationship between the two theoretical movements. I will examine, in turn, the

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[65] Magnus, "postmodern," The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, 726.

affinities felt for postmodernism by feminism, some feminist quarrels with postmodernism, and lastly, selected interpretations of what a postmodern feminism would look like. I will use six different authors to circumscribe the debate: Nancy Fraser, Linda J. Nicholson, Jane Flax, Christine Di Stefano, Sandra Harding, and Seyla Benhabib, some of whom wish to ally with the postmodern cause, and others who remain suspicious of the postmodern enterprise. With reference to these feminist views, I will exhibit the tensions that can be found among them. In Chapter Three, I shall more fully consider these tensions in order to demonstrate the way in which an understanding of the linguistic turn will help to resolve them.

2.2   Feminist Affinities for Postmodernism

Both feminists and postmodernists have as their founding principle the critique of modern thought, and thus it is no surprise that they have similar concerns regarding modernity. However, the similarities between postmodernism and feminism lie not in their results or in their methods of critique, which tend to vary greatly, but rather in that which is called into question. Postmodernists and feminists often bring their investigations into common content to very different conclusions. Yet this does not mitigate the importance of their similarities of focus, which are outlined by Seyla Benhabib in *Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism*.

Benhabib's survey of the similar critical orientations of postmodernism and feminism builds upon Jane Flax's characterization of the postmodern position. According to Flax, "one of the most important [postmodernist] claims is that Western

culture is about to experience or has already experienced, but has been denying, an interrelated series of deaths. These include the deaths of Man, History, and Metaphysics."[66] To these three theses, Benhabib adds the feminist counterpoints, which she refers to as 'the demystification of the male subject of reason,' 'the engendering of historical narrative,' and 'feminist skepticism toward the claims of transcendent reason.' I will examine each of these themes in turn.

2.2.1 The Death of Man – The Demystification of the Male Subject of Reason

The postmodernist, Flax points out, contends that "Man is forever caught in the web of fictive meaning, in chains of signification, in which the subject is merely another position in language."[67] In other words, the postmodernists contend that the subject is a part of the very discourse of which it was previously thought to be the detached and independent creator. Indeed, they argue that, since the fundamental re-orientation of thought generated by Descartes, modern philosophy has been under the spell of a fictitious subject. On the postmodern account then, this Cartesian subject is exposed as an effect of discourse that is necessarily embedded in a particular social, temporal or linguistic context. Thus, the self is not autonomous because she cannot take up a detached standpoint; she has "no pure reason or constituting consciousness with independent, nonlinguistic, or nonhistorical access to the Real or Being of the World."[68]

Contemporary feminism also takes exception to the modern account of the subject. The feminist version of the Death of Man thesis stresses that the modern subject,

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[66] Flax, Thinking Fragments, 32.
[67] Flax, Thinking Fragments, 32.
[68] Flax, Thinking Fragments, 33.

once thought to be representative of human beings as such, is not only influenced by historical, social, linguistic and cultural practices, but also by gender. That is, while the postmodernist maintains that the subject is an effect of discourse, feminists further point out that the subject also reflects the gender relations that are found in any given culture, society, period, or language. As Benhabib states, "feminists claim that 'gender' and the various practices contributing to its constitution are one of the most crucial contexts in which to situate the purportedly neutral and universal subject of reason."[69] Thus, the subject of modern thought is no longer autonomous, removed from both time and place. Furthermore, the subject is no longer universal. Instead, the subject is located both in the world, and in the body, and is constituted by those very practices that it was once understood to have created. While the postmodernist subject views the world from a culturally and historically determined location, the feminist postmodernist subject also approaches the world from a point of view that includes gender. The impact of gender must not be underestimated, feminists point out, in determining the identity of the subject.

2.2.2 The Death of History – The Engendering of Historical Narrative

The postmodernist critique of modern thought contends that "Man constructs stories he calls History in order to find or justify a place for himself within time."[70] Within modern thought, History is thought to possess an inner logic or order, and this logic involves a "pregiven goal toward which Man is steadily moving."[71] In other words,

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[69] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 212.
[70] Flax, Thinking Fragments, 33.
[71] Flax, Thinking Fragments, 33.

the modern philosopher imposes a logical progression on the passage of time, which is understood as existing for the sole purpose of realizing a specific, predetermined goal. Within this story or 'master narrative,' Man is understood to be the Hero around whom the progression of history revolves. As Flax points out, "This goal or purpose is meant for Man; it expresses or realizes him at his best. The closer he comes to it, the closer he comes to himself, to his essence."[72] For example, the coming to self-consciousness of freedom, or the ultimate goal of achieving a communist state, are expressions of the role played by man within the world.

In opposition to the modern understanding of History, postmodernists point out that this view of history requires identifying the essence of humanity. Whether it be reason, freedom, or the capacity to labour, the purpose of Man and of History is to come closer to and reveal his authentic reality. Not only do postmodernists take exception to the ideal of essential human nature that is inextricably linked to the modern view of History, but, more importantly, they disagree with its teleological nature. That is, postmodernists insist that History, understood as a teleological metanarrative, is no longer feasible. In place of the modern view of History, they advocate a micro-social, genealogical understanding of history, which creates analyses that do not transcend any given historical, cultural or discursive location. With this new understanding of history, postmodernists aim to circumvent issues that accompany the modern reliance upon the ideals of unity, homogeneity, and closure. Postmodernists argue that "Any appearance of

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[72] Flax, <u>Thinking Fragments</u>, 33.

unity presupposes and requires a prior act of violence."[73]   That is, the structured appearance of History espoused by modern philosophy entails the suppression of alternate stories.

The feminist counterpoint to the postmodern Death of History is 'the engendering of historical narrative.' This theoretical concern centers around what is seen as the problematic equation of male and universal. The feminist critique of the modern view of History raises the point that this history has been, literally, 'his story.' It is clear that those who have traditionally written and analyzed history have been "white, propertied, Christian, male head[s] of household."[74] Thus, these individuals have had the privileged position of dictating the progression and purpose of History for all people. Indeed, the stories we have heard and that have been laid out for us have been theirs. Quite often, we see that women are altogether left out of these master narratives, relegated to the margins, and doomed to watch time march by. Furthermore, this desire for a united, homogeneous and linear understanding of history has typically silenced alternate stories. As Benhabib points out, "until very recently neither did women have their own history, their own narrative with different categories of periodization and with different structural regularities."[75] We see that the goal of the engendering of historical narrative mirrors, once again, the liberal/radical/cultural feminist debate. While liberal feminists advocate including women within the dominant metanarrative, radical feminists argue for a parallel narrative that accounts for women's experience, while cultural (and postmodern)

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[73] Flax, Thinking Fragments, 33.
[74] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 212.
[75] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 213.

feminists insist upon the elimination of metanarratives altogether in favour of multiple, local narratives.

2.2.3 The Death of Metaphysics – Feminist Skepticism Toward the Claims of Transcendent Reason

As I described in Chapter One, the modern philosophical project sought to overcome the schism between subject and object, and thereby understand how knowledge of the external world was possible. In response to this question, the episteme of representation was developed, which defined "*knowledge as representation*, according to which the subject stands over against an independent world of objects that it can more or less accurately represent."[76] Philosophy thus became the adjudicator of knowledge claims, attaining a privileged position in relation to the empirical sciences because of its ability to define what did and did not count as knowledge.

The view of philosophy as the adjudicator of knowledge claims, or as the discourse of legitimation, comes under attack from postmodern critics. They insist that "philosophy is necessarily a fictive, nonrepresentational activity,"[77] which can make no claim to representing reality. Postmodernists argue that "There is no way to test whether one story is closer to the truth than another because there is no transcendental standpoint."[78] Thus, as Lyotard and Rorty conclude, legitimation must descend to the micro-social level and decisions must be pragmatically determined within a given context.

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[76] Baynes, "General Introduction," After Philosophy: End or Transformation?, 4-5.
[77] Flax, Thinking Fragments, 37.
[78] Flax, Thinking Fragments, 37.

The feminist counterpoint to the Death of Metaphysics thesis brings to awareness the possibility that, if the content of philosophy is not *a priori* or present to be discovered, then it must be imbued with the particular interests possessed by the creator(s). That is, philosophy must always be perspectival. As Benhabib explains, "activities of [the] subject bear in every instance the marks of the context out of which they emerge, [and] the subject of philosophy is inevitably embroiled with knowledge-governing interests which mark and direct its activities."[79] The interests of the subject involved with philosophical inquiry become guiding principles in determining both the content and form of knowledge. This is of particular importance to feminists, who contend that gender relations and differences are some of the key interests that become involved in the creation of philosophy. Moreover, because modern philosophy was dominated by men, it was thus imbued with their interests.

2.3   Feminist Quarrels with Postmodernism

As we have seen, there are many similarities between the feminist and postmodernist critiques of modern thought. However, despite these commonalities, many feminists have been hesitant to identify with the postmodern cause. Indeed, several feminist theorists have argued that these similarities are simply not sufficient to create a close alliance between the two theoretical movements. While hesitancy on the feminist side does not necessarily indicate a complete rejection of postmodernism (this will be

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[79] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 213.

discussed further in the section 2.4), there are several points of contention around which feminist theorists revolve. Rosemarie Tong summarizes this in the following passage:

> As attractive as the postmodern feminist approach to philosophy may be, some feminist philosophers worry that an overemphasis on difference and a rejection of unity may lead to intellectual as well as political disintegration. If feminist philosophy is to be without any standpoint whatsoever, it becomes difficult to ground claims about what is *good* for women in particular and for human beings in general. It is a major challenge to contemporary feminist philosophy, therefore, to reconcile the pressures for diversity and difference with those for integration and commonality.[80]

As this quote reveals, the political dimension of feminism adds another level of complexity to the feminist-postmodernist debate. While postmodernism is often heralded as a blessing to feminist theory *qua* theory, feminism's sociopolitical goals tend to be threatened by the claims of postmodern theory. This is a recurring theme in the feminist-postmodernist debate, and will be evident in my discussions that follow. In order to flesh out this perspective, I will look at three authors: Di Stefano, Harding, and Benhabib, all of whom express profound skepticism regarding the supposed promise of postmodernism for feminist theory.

2.3.1 Christine Di Stefano: The Political Subject

Di Stefano, in *Dilemmas of Difference: Feminism, Modernity, and Postmodernism*, attempts to weigh the merits and risks of a political linkage between feminism and postmodernism. She points out that it was modernism's portrayal of sociopolitical arrangements that created the space required for the feminist identification of gender as a category worthy of critique. Modern theorists' sociopolitical arrangements

typically relied upon strictly defined, naturally based sex roles. Yet the work of early feminist critics separated these biological differences (sex) from culturally-instituted or socially-constructed differences (gender). However, once the category of gender was identified, the next challenge to be faced was to determine precisely how basic gender differences were.

In order to explicate the various perspectives that emerge from this question, Di Stefano provides an account of the divergent streams of feminist thought (liberal, radical and cultural) in accordance with gender relations. She identifies liberal feminists as individuals who do not perceive gender as being basic in a fundamentally constitutive way. Thus, these individuals will search for a politics that transcends gender difference. This theory is opposed to that of the radical feminists, who view gender differences as being significantly basic, and who will "pursue a politics of difference which can speak to women's alienated...but also potentially critical identity."[81] However, gender itself came under scrutiny by cultural feminists, and it was charged as "a disastrous and oppressive fiction, the fiction of 'woman,' which runs roughshod over multiple differences among and within women."[82]

However, Di Stefano also points out that the theoretical and normative elements of gender relations play an important role in the development of feminist theory alongside the empirical aspect. Moreover, this theoretical/normative element cannot be deduced from or resolved by empirical strategies. Feminist theory asks not only how

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[80] Rosemarie Tong, "feminist philosophy," The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, second edition, ed. Robert Audi. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 306.
[81] Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," Feminism/Postmodernism, 65.
[82] Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," Feminism/Postmodernism, 65.

basic gender differences are, but "how basic *we want them to be* for particular purposes and ends."[83] That is, in order to embrace a feminist politics, feminist theory must decide how the concept of gender relations will be employed – and given "their tenacious rootedness in an objective world created over time and deeply resistant to change,"[84] Di Stefano suggests that gender relations is a concept that requires constant and repeated attention.

Di Stefano's quarrel with postmodernism is revealed by her warning that the cultural feminist call to overcome gender in favour of a proliferation of differences entails the denial of the subject. She argues that postmodernism is detrimental to the normative goals of feminism because of its denial of a subject and of a standpoint. Postmodernism, she claims, is "entrenched in the dilemmas of difference."[85] In liberal feminism, gender differences are subsumed under the masculine universal and, in effect, *she* becomes *he*. In radical feminism, the feminine is revalorized, but not criticized. Thus, *she* must remain as a she who has no means to remove herself from an imposed femininity. However, postmodernism does not remove us from this problematic dichotomy. In postmodernism, the female subject simply "dissolves into a perplexing plurality of differences, none of which can be theoretically or politically privileged over others."[86] When this happens, feminist politics becomes impossible.[87] She argues that

To the extent that feminist politics is bound up with a specific constituency or

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[83] Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," <u>Feminism/Postmodernism</u>, 66.
[84] Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," <u>Feminism/Postmodernism</u>, 78.
[85] Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," <u>Feminism/Postmodernism</u>, 77.
[86] Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," <u>Feminism/Postmodernism</u>, 77.
[87] This becomes an issue not only for feminist politics, but for any political movement that is defined by identity, including, for example, the civil or gay rights movements.

subject, namely, women, the postmodernist prohibition against subject-centered inquiry and theory undermines the legitimacy of a broad-based organized movement dedicated to articulating and implementing the goals of such a constituency.[88]

Di Stefano's argument points to one of the central problems encountered by postmodern feminism, which is the apparent inability to create a coherent political movement upon the deconstruction of categories. The move from identity to difference, from unity to multiplicity, throws the concept of a unified movement into doubt. With an emphasis on difference rather than unity, the idea of a woman's movement becomes suspect. Indeed, if the boundaries of categories are easily transgressed, if identity can be 'played with', as it were, then for whom does feminism fight? Without groups, and specifically a group known as 'woman' which can be demonstrated as being oppressed, the idea of feminism is rendered pointless.

2.3.2   Sandra Harding: Feminist Science Projects

Like Di Stefano, Sandra Harding offers a skeptical view of the promise of postmodernism. In *Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques*, Harding argues that feminism can and does take advantage of both Enlightenment and postmodern agendas. She believes that the feminist ambivalence surrounding science and epistemology is a positive program, identifying the "sometimes conflicting, legitimate political and theoretical needs of women today."[89] Thus, Harding invokes feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint theory as examples of theories that are uniquely situated in 'no man's land,' between the modern and postmodern. These theories provide

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[88] Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," Feminism/Postmodernism, 76.
[89] Harding, "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques," Feminism/Postmodernism, 86.

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a way of attending to these conflicting needs, while still providing a basis for action within the feminist movement. Like all justificatory strategies, these theories arose in response to the need for a basis on which to make choices in theory, research and politics. The two approaches differ insofar as feminist empiricism seeks to develop and refine the ideal of objectivity that is necessitated by the traditional scientific method, while standpoint theory alters the traditional scientific method by imposing historical principles of inquiry. In both cases, Harding asserts that their uniquely feminist approach can be used specifically to direct struggles to eliminate the oppression of women.

Feminist empiricists identify the underlying problematic of science as, quite simply, poorly done science. From the identification and articulation of scientific problems to the design and interpretation of data, the traditional scientific enterprise is fraught with androcentric biases. In order to eliminate these biases, feminist empiricists seek stricter adherence to existing scientific methods. In revealing these biases, feminist empiricists "make it possible for people to see the world in an enlarged perspective because they remove the covers and blinders that obscure knowledge and observation."[90] Thus, while the women's movement created new conditions under which science could be practiced, the norms and principles of scientific inquiry remain the same. Indeed, "the social values and political agendas of feminists raise new issues, enlarge the scope of inquiry, and reveal cause for greater care in the conduct of research."[91]

Because feminist empiricism embraces rather than challenges the paradigm of

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[90] Harding, "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques," Feminism/Postmodernism, 91.
[91] Harding, "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques," Feminism/Postmodernism, 92.

objective science, it does not obviously enter into the terrain of the postmodern. However, Harding points out that the feminist empiricist is also in tension with traditional scientific assumptions, because of her claim that the researcher's location in history enables her to produce less biased research. That is, the feminist empiricist assertion that it is possible to produce less biased research while being located in history, is clearly in tension with Enlightenment understandings of science and objectivity, which declare that the ideal knower must be ahistorical. As Harding states, "Feminist empiricism holds on to the idea that a goal of science is to produce less biased, more objective claims, but it also insists on what is overtly forbidden in empiricism – the importance of analyzing and assigning different epistemological values to the social identities of inquirers."[92] Thus, feminist empiricism is clearly situated between modernity and postmodernism. While this feminist science project insists that science is capable of, and ought to continue seeking "less biased, more objective claims," feminist empiricism cannot be understood as simply carrying on the androcentric scientific project as defined within modern philosophy.

As she does with feminist empiricism, Harding places feminist standpoint theory between modernity and postmodernism. However, feminist standpoint theory is much more dramatically and self-consciously situated than feminist empiricism. While feminist empiricism raises the question of the historically situated knowing subject, standpoint theory pushes this idea to more radical conclusions. This feminist science project argues that those who belong to a socially or politically marginalized group are

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[92] Harding, "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques," Feminism/Postmodernism, 93.

able to take up an epistemically privileged position. Thus, "standpoint theory explicitly articulates, develops, and pushes to more radical conclusions the anti-Enlightenment tendencies that were only implicit in feminist empiricism."[93]

The knowing subject of feminist standpoint theory is located on the margins of a dominant society, and thus has privileged insight into both her own world, and into the dominant society from which she is excluded. Thus, "what is a disadvantage in terms of their oppression *can* become an advantage in terms of science."[94] In other words, women, because of their marginalized status, are able to apply to the objects of scientific inquiry, new and unique concepts arising from their uniquely gendered experiences. That is, by critically engaging with one's gendered experiences as well as the broader social contexts in which they occur, one can occupy the feminist standpoint. The value that is placed upon the situatedness of the knowing subject within feminist standpoint theory is unquestionably much more radical than that forwarded by feminist empiricism. Therefore, it is also much more akin to postmodernism and its criticisms of traditional science. However, it does not completely take leave of traditional Enlightenment assumptions insofar as it still has as its goal the accumulation of knowledge, and the use of this knowledge for political ends.

2.3.3   Seyla Benhabib: The Value of Metaphysics

Like Harding, Benhabib shares the ambivalence felt by feminists regarding modernity. In *Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism*, she writes, "women cannot

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[93] Harding, "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques," Feminism/Postmodernism, 97.
[94] Harding, "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques," Feminism/Postmodernism, 98.

but have an ambivalent relationship to modernity, which on the one hand promises them so much and which yet on the other constantly subverts its own *promesse du bonheur.*"[95] However, she maintains that this ambivalence is neither a sufficient nor a necessary reason to invoke a postmodern position. Indeed, such a move would be disastrous, since postmodernism "is not only incompatible with but would undermine the very possibility of feminism as the theoretical articulation of the emancipatory aspirations of women."[96]

Benhabib underwrites this claim by explicating the outcomes of the three postmodern theses – the death of Man[97], History and Metaphysics (as found in section 2.2). She contends that strong versions of the three theses, thought through to their conclusions, threaten the efficacy – even the possibility – of a movement based on the goal of female emancipation. However, despite this gloomy forecast of the 'promise' of postmodernism, Benhabib also formulates weakened versions of the three postmodern theses – versions that are more congenial to the feminist cause. Yet we will see that even these milder versions still pose a threat to feminist political practice.

In its strong version, the postmodern Death of the Subject thesis anticipates the utter dissolution of the subject. When the self simply becomes another position in language or a series of performances (Butler)[98], she avoids creative responsibility. Without creative responsibility, it becomes impossible to act as an "accountable

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[95] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," <u>Situating the Self</u>, 17.

[96] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," <u>Situating the Self</u>, 229.

[97] Throughout her essay "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Benhabib refers to the postmodern 'Death of Man' as the postmodern 'Death of the Subject' as well. Thus, I will also be using these two phrases interchangeably.

[98] Judith Butler argues that gender achieves the appearance of normalcy only through repetitive performance. See Judith Butler, <u>Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity</u>, (London: Routledge, 1990)

participant in the community of discourse and inquiry."[99] Indeed, how does one maintain the ability to reflect upon and creatively alter a discourse if one is mired within it? Ultimately, this ability is the foundation of all communication and social action and, most importantly, the foundation of the normative vision of feminism. Thus, it is clear that the strong version of the Death of the Subject is incommensurable with feminism.

However, Benhabib's formulation of a weak version of the Death of the Subject thesis allows space for feminist political practice to continue. The weak version of this thesis entails the radical situatedness of the subject. That is, the subject retains the traditional attributes of autonomy and rationality, while taking account of her situatedness within social and linguistic practices.

The strong version of the postmodern Death of History entails a complete rejection of any narrative that seeks to explain things beyond the micro-social level. Thus, the postmodern death of History "occludes the epistemological interest in history and in historical narrative which accompany the aspirations of all struggling historical actors."[100] Because postmodernism focuses on micro- rather than macro-social practices, the ability to examine or theorize about lengthy historical narratives is undermined. By way of criticizing this strong version, Benhabib poses for us an essential question: "Is it possible for struggling groups not to interpret history in light of a moral-political imperative, namely, the imperative of the future interest in emancipation?"[101] When the normative interests of feminism are employed as a lens through which the past is to be

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[99] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 216.
[100] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 220.
[101] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 220.

interpreted, issues that have traditionally been erased or devalued receive new importance. Because the postmodern death of History impedes rather than aids this process, it becomes evident that the strong version is a detriment to feminist political practice.

The weak version of the Death of History thesis, on the other hand, allows room for narratives that transcend the local to take into account open-ended questions of scientific inquiry. Benhabib insists that it is up to the social scientist to determine the scope of inquiry based upon the task at hand. Yet at the same time, the "call to end the practice of 'grand narratives' which are essentialist and monocausal"[102] is maintained, and thus no group can claim to represent the forces of History. In other words, grand political movements will be rejected outright, as it is clear that no group can claim knowledge of the goal or forces of historical progression, and can therefore not act according to them.

Finally, Benhabib turns to the strong version of the postmodern Death of Metaphysics, which is exemplified by the work of Jacques Derrida. According to this line of critique, "Western metaphysics has been under the spell of the 'metaphysics of presence' at least since Plato."[103] Benhabib argues that this critique "itself proceeds under the spell of a meta-narrative."[104] This meta-narrative, she maintains, is essentially a straw man, because the postmodern "characterization of the philosophical tradition

[102] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 219.
[103] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 223. Derrida develops his critique of Western metaphysics out of Heidegger's work on the 'metaphysics of presence.' See footnote 20 for a more detailed description of Heidegger's position.
[104] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 223.

allows postmodernists the rhetorical advantage of presenting what they are arguing against in its least defensible versions."[105]   To present modern metaphysics as a monolithic and essentialist movement that merely emphasizes the privileged position of philosophy in relation to the Real is a faulty starting point.   That is, the understanding of modern philosophy as perpetuating a form of naïve realism simply glosses over the many conflicting and contradictory philosophical systems developed by, for example, Hobbes, Kant, and Hegel.   Thus, Benhabib maintains that the postmodern meta-narrative ignores the complexities and nuances of modern philosophy.   She concludes that reducing modern philosophy to a very specific and undesirable relationship to the Real renders those conceptual schemes unrecognizable and useless, and that which is valuable must be discarded with the rest.

Benhabib also discusses a weak version of the postmodern Death of Metaphysics, which she attributes to Richard Rorty.[106]   Rorty equates modern philosophy with epistemology, and argues that philosophy should no longer be viewed as "a metadiscourse of legitimation, articulating the criteria of validity presupposed by all other discourses."[107]   However, Benhabib insists that, because this epistemological role is the defining feature of modern philosophy, once it is denied, "philosophy loses its raison d'etre."[108]   That is, the weak version of the postmodern Death of Metaphysics would see philosophy eliminated altogether.   Thus, Benhabib asserts that even the weak version of

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[105] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 223.
[106] I will not revisit Rorty's position in detail at this point. Refer to section 1.4.2 for a description of his position regarding modern metaphysics.
[107] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 224.
[108] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 224.

the postmodern Death of Metaphysics spells the end of social criticism. Because feminism relies upon justificatory strategies beyond the micro-social and *ad hoc* criticism offered by the postmodernist, the end of philosophy necessarily implies the end of feminism as social critic as well.

Benhabib argues that "[s]ocial criticism without some form of philosophy is not possible, and without social criticism the project of a feminist theory which is at once committed to knowledge and to the emancipatory interests of women in inconceivable."[109] Thus, we see that Benhabib's examination of the postmodern Death of Metaphysics thesis amounts to a discrediting of the feminist goal of allying with postmodernism. As she points out, "Postmodernism, in its infinitely skeptical and subversive attitude toward normative claims, institutional justice and political struggles, is certainly refreshing. Yet, it is also debilitating."[110]

2.4   Postmodern Feminisms

Thus, we see that there is a great deal of tension in feminist literature when it comes to postmodernism. Some advocate an alliance between the two theoretical movements, while others argue that such an alliance is impossible. However, the sympathies between the two movements simply cannot be ignored, and it is this fact that has caused many feminist theorists to articulate a very specific formulation of 'postmodern feminism,' in which postmodern claims are tailored to suit the normative,

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[109]   Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," <u>Situating the Self</u>, 225.
[110]   Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," <u>Situating the Self</u>, 15.

institutional and political needs of feminism. I will briefly outline two of these formulations, articulated by Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson's *Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism*,[111] and Jane Flax in *Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory*.

2.4.1 Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson: Postmodern Feminist Theory

Fraser and Nicholson have together authored a much-cited version of postmodern feminism. They contend that both postmodernism and feminism "have sought to develop new paradigms of social criticism which do not rely on traditional philosophical underpinnings."[112] However, postmodernists make the mistake of focusing too much on issues found within the philosophical realm, thus threatening the efficacy of social criticism, while feminists tend to focus too much upon social criticism, often lapsing into problematic philosophical tendencies. Thus, Fraser/Nicholson contend that an alliance of the two movements would allow for their complementarity to emerge.

In order to maintain the force of social criticism found within feminism, and the skepticism regarding essentialism and metanarratives found within postmodernism, they contend that "postmodern-feminist theory would be pragmatic and fallibilistic. It would tailor its methods and categories to the specific task at hand, using multiple categories when appropriate and forswearing the meta-physical comfort of a single feminist method or feminist epistemology."[113] In other words, such a theory would not search for an essence or universal feature of womanhood to be used as a basis for the criticism of

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[111] For ease of reading, I will be using 'Fraser/Nicholson' to designate the article co-authored by Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson.

[112] Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy," Feminism/Postmodernism, 19.

[113] Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy," Feminism/Postmodernism, 35.

gender relations. Rather, categories of criticism would be "inflected by temporality, with historically specific institutional categories like the modern, restricted, male-headed, nuclear family taking precedence over ahistorical, functionalist categories like reproduction and mothering."[114]

They argue that "postmodern feminists need not abandon the large theoretical tools needed to address large political problems. There is nothing self-contradictory in the idea of a postmodern theory."[115] The integral difference in this position is that these theoretical tools will not be based on modern conceptions of universality or essences. Rather, they will be "explicitly historical, attuned to the cultural specificity of different societies and periods and to that of different groups within societies and periods...[and categories] would be genealogized, that is, framed by a historical narrative and rendered temporally and culturally specific."[116]

2.4.2   Jane Flax: Gender Relations

Like Fraser/Nicholson, Flax constructs a postmodern feminist theory in *Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory*. From the very outset of her analysis, Flax identifies feminist theory as a type of postmodern philosophy, because it

> reveals and contributes to the growing uncertainty within Western intellectual circles about the appropriate grounding and methods for explaining and interpreting human experience. Contemporary feminists join other postmodern philosophers in raising important metatheoretical questions about the possible nature and status of theorizing itself.[117]

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[114]   Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy," <u>Feminism/Postmodernism</u>, 34.
[115]   Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy," <u>Feminism/Postmodernism</u>, 34.
[116]   Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy," <u>Feminism/Postmodernism</u>, 34.
[117]   Jane Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory," <u>Feminism/Postmodernism</u>, ed. Linda J. Nicholson. (New York: Routledge, 1990) 40-41.

Thus, while feminist theorists may feel an affinity for the logical, ordered world of Enlightenment thought, their profound critique of this very world demonstrates that feminist theory more closely resembles and is more appropriately associated with postmodernism.

Flax also categorizes feminist theory as a form of social criticism. Gender relations, as the central object of feminist theorizing, becomes the site of the meeting of feminism as social criticism and feminism as postmodern philosophy. Yet 'gender relations' is itself a complex set of social processes that is not easily analyzed. Even the existence of gender relations was typically concealed by modern thought, until it was problematized by feminist theorists. Thus, because gender relations vary across culture and time, the criticism of these structures must be attuned to cultural and historical variability. The tendency to reduce the complexities of gender to simple, unified wholes for explanatory purposes hides the "permeability and pervasiveness of gender relations and the need for new sorts of theorizing."[118] This variability, permeability, and pervasiveness all contribute to the need for us to understand that there is no such category as 'woman,' apart from specific time, location and context.

Moreover, because 'woman' exists only as part of gender relations, "none of us can speak for 'woman' because no such person exists except within a specific set of (already gendered) relations – to 'man' and to many concrete and different women."[119] A postmodern feminist theory must therefore take account of this vast array of differences,

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[118] Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations," Feminism/Postmodernism, 53.
[119] Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations," Feminism/Postmodernism, 56.

and "should encourage us to tolerate and interpret ambivalence, ambiguity, and multiplicity as well as to expose the roots of our needs for imposing order and structure no matter how arbitrary and oppressive these needs may be."[120]

Conclusion

The relationship between feminism and postmodernism is clearly fraught with tension. It remains true that there are certain similarities between the two theoretical movements. Yet whether this is a sufficient cause for feminists to ally with the postmodern cause remains to be seen, since both theoretical and political concerns come to the forefront when the concepts of the subject, of history, and of metaphysics are called into question. Chapter Three turns to an examination of the tensions revealed by the works discussed in this Chapter, then draws together Chapters One and Two to consider how a clearer understanding of the linguistic turn's role in the development of postmodernism can help to alleviate some of these tensions.

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[120] Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations," <u>Feminism/Postmodernism</u>, 56.

CHAPTER 3

FEMINISM AND THE LINGUISTIC TURN

*What began as an exchange about feminism and postmodernism
has turned largely into a dispute about how best to interpret the
linguistic turn. This development is not surprising. Feminists,
like other theorists, work today in a context marked by the
problematization of language.*
Fraser, <u>Pragmatism, Feminism, and the Linguistic Turn</u> (157)

Introduction

The goal of Chapter One was to identify and define the linguistic turn and to
demonstrate the role it played in the development of the postmodern agenda. Chapter
Two sought to outline the complexities of the relationship between feminism and
postmodernism. Chapter Three will bring these two chapters together by discussing the
role of the linguistic turn within this relationship. What I hope to make clear is that an
examination of the linguistic turn within the context of the feminist-postmodernist debate
will shed light on the difficulties that have plagued the relationship from its very outset.
According to Rorty, linguistic philosophy is "the most recent philosophical
revolution,"[121] yet very few feminists have directly engaged with linguistic philosophy.

In this chapter, I seek to open up this dialogue in order to determine the potential
that such an analysis may hold. I begin by rendering explicit the tensions that were only
implicit in the exegesis of various feminist positions provided in Chapter Two. Then, I
take these tensions and examine each in relation to the linguistic turn, arguing that a clear
understanding of the linguistic turn's impact on the current philosophical environment
will mitigate some of the difficulties in the feminist-postmodernist debate. An analysis of

the linguistic turn reveals that those feminist theorists who advocate an alliance with postmodernism do not go far enough. In some cases, they have made the linguistic turn, but wrongly equate this move with taking up a postmodern position. In other cases, those feminist theorists who advocate an alliance with postmodernism, have not even made the linguistic turn. By examining the tensions in light of the imperatives of the linguistic turn, we see that some feminist theorists who critique feminism for retaining modern assumptions, fall victim to this very tendency themselves.

3.1   Tensions

The key issue that contemporary feminist theorists must face is that, within the current philosophical context, it seems to be the case that one can be neither completely pro- nor completely anti-postmodern. If these theorists consider postmodernism to be irrelevant, useless, or even harmful, then they risk ignoring the findings that cultural feminists have brought to the foreground. Thus, a strictly anti-postmodernist position runs the risk of undermining feminist political practice insofar as such a position does not pay sufficient attention to the difficulties of difference. On the other hand, if one takes up a postmodern stance, one risks undermining the normative goals and transformative power of feminism due to a lack of justificatory strategies. Thus, those who wish to ally with postmodernism also run the risk of undermining feminist political practice. This tense relationship between feminism and postmodernism is perhaps best characterized as

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[121] Rorty, "Introduction: The Linguistic Turn, 3.

a love-hate relationship. While postmodernism promises so much, it also threatens to take so much away.

This over-arching difficulty has three more specific dimensions that are taken up by feminist theorists. I maintain that the debate among feminist theorists mirrors the three postmodern deaths – of Man, of History, and of Metaphysics – as discussed in Chapter Two. Varied interpretations of these deaths have generated considerable debate concerning the value of the subject, the usefulness of history, and the necessity of epistemology for feminist theory. As we will see, these difficulties are exacerbated when considered in the context of feminist political organizing. This is, perhaps, why feminist theory presents one of the most robust challenges for postmodernism. Not only is postmodernism challenged by feminists on the basis of its theoretical assumptions, but also in reference to its practical value. The remainder of section 3.2 seeks to render explicit the tensions that were only implicit in Chapter Two. Once revealed, they will then be examined in section 3.3, in light of the linguistic turn.

3.1.1   The Subject: Flax, Di Stefano, and Benhabib

While the role of the subject is certainly called into question by both feminists and postmodernists, feminist theorists do not all agree with one another about how far the critique should be taken. The disagreement raises the question of what sort of subjectivity is required for feminist organizing, and it is most clearly revealed in the works of Jane Flax and Christine Di Stefano. While Flax insists that subjectivity must be fluid and multiple, Di Stefano argues that fractured identities of the sort proposed by Flax provide an insufficient basis for feminist political organizing. Seyla Benhabib also enters

into the fray, arguing that, while the subject can be 'radically situated,' we must also be able to attribute responsibility to her.

Jane Flax views gender relations as the central concern of feminist theory, and thus takes gender relations as the starting point of her investigation into the role of subjectivity. However, she quickly points out that "the writings of women of colour have compelled white feminists to confront problems of difference and the relations of domination that are conditions of possibility for the coherence of our own theorizing and category formation."[122] That is, the challenges of cultural feminism have forced feminists to question the theoretical bases of their politics. Issues of class and race become intermixed with issues of gender, thus necessitating a new understanding of gender relations that takes these sorts of differences into account. Flax argues that "the experience of gender relations for any person and the structure of gender as a social category are shaped by interactions of gender relations and other social relations such as class and race."[123] She asserts, therefore, that this problematization of gender and gender relations leads feminist theorists toward a new understanding of subjectivity.

Because subjects are constituted by multiple axes of identity, and because these identities vary over time, Flax insists that "a unitary self is unnecessary, impossible, and a dangerous illusion."[124] In place of the unified self of modern philosophy, she advocates a multiple and fluid subjectivity. "Only multiple and fluid subjects," she argues, "can develop a strong enough aversion to domination to struggle against its always present and

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[122] Jane Flax, Disputed Subjects: Essays on Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Philosophy. (New York: Routledge, 1993) 145.
[123] Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations," Feminism/Postmodernism, 40.
[124] Flax, Disputed Subjects, 93.

endlessly seductive temptations."[125] Because "the unitary self is an effect of many kinds of relations of domination," Flax contends that "it can only sustain its unity by splitting off or repressing other parts of its own and others' subjectivity."[126] That is, fractured or multiple subjects are able to sustain the illusion of unity only by dominating 'lesser' aspects of the self. By becoming a participant in domination in this way, it becomes difficult for such subjects to struggle against its "endlessly seductive temptations."

Flax argues, therefore, that in the case of feminist theory, assuming a unified and clearly delineated category of woman, upon which a politics of emancipation is based, simply recreates or reinforces relations of domination. If one understands feminism as seeking to emancipate women, then any given woman, in order to be a feminist, may be required to suppress issues that arise due to her class or race. Likewise, other women will have to be seen as women first, while other aspects of their identity are only secondary. Because of these difficulties, and because identity and its relations are both complex and changing, Flax insists that "none of us can speak for 'woman' because no such person exists except within a specific set of (already gendered) relations."[127] Any attempt to define a category of woman that can be employed once and for all within feminist theory and politics will necessarily be inadequate. Thus, because feminism is confused by multiple, fractured identities, as well as heavily influenced by the social relations through which gender is constructed, Flax encourages us to "tolerate and interpret ambivalence,

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[125] Flax, <u>Disputed Subjects</u>, 110.
[126] Flax, <u>Disputed Subjects</u>, 109.
[127] Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations," <u>Feminism/Postmodernism</u>, 56.

ambiguity, and multiplicity [and] expose the roots of our needs for imposing order and structure."[128] She further points out that, because of these characteristics, feminist theory is properly understood as a type of postmodern philosophy.

Like Flax, Christine Di Stefano begins her investigation into the role of subjectivity with gender. However, she disagrees with Flax both theoretically and politically. On the theoretical front, she claims that, "If we are encouraged to embrace fractured identities, we are inevitably drawn to the forbidden question: Fractured with respect to *what*?"[129] Di Stefano argues that the postmodern fracturing of identities includes the inevitable incorporation of the modern understanding of subjectivity as a unitary, ahistorical self. Fractured identities, she insists, are constructed upon the basis of a unified, core self, which is then split apart in order to account for difference. She also argues that fractured identity "is not a recognition, but a reduction to difference, to absolute indifference, equivalence, interchangeability."[130] That is, the subject "dissolves into a perplexing plurality of differences, none of which can be theoretically or politically privileged over others."[131]

This is the political basis for Di Stefano's argument against Flax's understanding of subjectivity, and against a feminist alliance with postmodernism. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, Di Stefano argues that shared identity, under the category of woman, is required for feminist political action. She insists that the power of a politics based on solidarity of opposition rather than a shared identity is unreliable and "unable to generate

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[128] Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations," Feminism/Postmodernism, 56.
[129] Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," Feminism/Postmodernism, 76.
[130] Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," Feminism/Postmodernism, 77
[131] Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," Feminism/Postmodernism, 77.

sufficient attachment and motivation on the part of potential activists."[132] She questions the possibility of creating a politics of opposition based on a deconstructive understanding of identity, arguing that politics must, in order to be effective, be subject-centered. Feminist politics must be fought by, and for, women as a group that shares a common identity, and not just a common enemy.

Further, she opposes Flax's desire to turn away from the difficulties found in analyses of gender. Di Stefano points out that, "in our haste to deconstruct hierarchical distinctions such as gender as harmful illusions, we may fail to grasp 'their tenacious rootedness in an objective world created over time and deeply resistant to change'."[133] In other words, gender may be a system of categorization that we have functioned with for so long that it has become deeply ingrained in society and in our minds. To argue that "none of us can speak for 'woman'," as Flax does, is premature. Rather, she argues that the category of woman "May perhaps be best appreciated and utilized as an aporia within contemporary theory: as a recurring paradox, question, dead end, or blind spot to which we must repeatedly return."[134]

Benhabib also enters into the debate over the role of the subject within feminist theory after the postmodern turn. In *Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism*, she sheds light on the difficulties that underlie the conflicting views of Flax and Di Stefano. While Flax never offers a robust explanation of how feminist politics ought to proceed, Di Stefano never addresses the issue of the rationality or the autonomy of the subject.

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[132] Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," Feminism/Postmodernism, 76.
[133] Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," Feminism/Postmodernism, 77-78.
[134] Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," Feminism/Postmodernism, 78.

Thus, Benhabib seeks to remedy these shortcomings within her own account of subjectivity.

Benhabib agrees with the situated view of the self. That is, she is open to the possibility that the subject is situated within various social, linguistic or discursive practices. This revisioning allows the traditional modern concept of the self to be "reformulated by taking account of the radical situatedness of the subject."[135] "Surely," she argues, "a subjectivity that would not be structured by language, by narrative and by the symbolic codes of narrative available in a culture is unthinkable... These narratives are deeply colored and structured by the codes of expectable and understandable biographies and identities in our culture."[136] However, while it is possible to *situate* the subject, Benhabib asserts that it is not possible to *reduce* the subject to social, linguistic, or discursive practices if a politics of emancipation is to be maintained. She insists that the normative vision and goals of feminist politics require agents who are able to partake in rational discourse, and be accountable for their participation in it. She asks "how in fact the very project of female emancipation would be thinkable without such a regulative ideal of enhancing the agency, autonomy and selfhood of women."[137] In other words, we must assume that women are free to creatively alter their world, if we are to act politically to ensure that freedom. Thus, it is imperative that feminist theory avoid the postmodern dissolution of the subject.

How is it possible to mediate between these two requirements – that the subject is

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135 Benhabib, "Feminism of and the Question Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 214.
136 Benhabib, "Feminism of and the Question Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 214.
137 Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 214.

both autonomous and radically situated? In other words, how is it that the empirical self is free on Benhabib's account? Benhabib argues that modern philosophy does not offer an adequate resolution to this tension. She claims that both rationalist and empiricist accounts of the self "cannot do justice to those contingent processes of socialization through which an infant becomes a person, acquires language and reason, develops a sense of justice and autonomy, and becomes capable of projecting a narrative into the world of which she is not only the author but the actor as well."[138] In other words, Benhabib insists that philosophy should take seriously the findings of the social sciences in order to understand the way in which a human infant gains a sense of autonomy and the capacity for reason. A better understanding of individuation and socialization processes, informed by the social sciences, will provide the key to radically situating the subject while maintaining her autonomy. For this reason, Benhabib contends that "The analysis of gender once more forces the boundaries of disciplinary discourses toward a new integration of theoretical paradigms."[139]

Thus, we see that there are three sides to the debate regarding subjectivity. The first (Flax), argues that the self must be fluid and multiple, and that the complexity of gender relations undermines the idea of a movement based on the emancipation of women, conceived as a unified category. The second (Di Stefano), argues that fractured identities are theoretically suspect, and that shared identity is required to create a strong, reliable, political movement. The third (Benhabib) argues that the self, although radically

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[138] Benhabib, "Introduction: Communicative Ethics and the Claims of Gender, Community and Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 5.

[139] Benhabib, "Feminism of and the Question Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 218.

situated, is socialized to become an autonomous, rational agent, and is thus capable of creatively altering the world in which she lives.

3.1.2   History: Fraser and Nicholson, and Benhabib

The role of history within philosophical discourse is also the ground of some debate among feminist theorists. However, as Benhabib points out, "Of all positions normally associated with postmodernism, [the Death of History]…appears…to be the least problematic."[140]   This is because both feminists and postmodernists seek to undermine faith in teleological metanarratives. However, while it may be the case that the postmodern death of History does not rankle with feminists as much as the death of the Subject or of Metaphysics, it still gives rise to some discussion. I will outline the debate here with reference to Fraser/Nicholson, whose postmodern feminist theory is meant to be explicitly historical in the sense that it deals with genealogized categories, and Benhabib, who insists upon retaining an interest in history that seeks to retrieve it from the actual lives of women.

Both Fraser/Nicholson and Benhabib insist that the elimination of teleological metanarratives does not necessitate a move from global history to local stories. That is, they oppose Lyotard's conviction that analysis can take place only at the micro-social level. Furthermore, both authors argue that an understanding of women's place in history is a valuable tool in the feminist political project. Indeed, the ability to appeal to women's history is necessary to fully appreciate and to achieve the goal of emancipation. In order to retrieve this history, Fraser/Nicholson offer their postmodern feminist theory

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[140]   Benhabib, "Feminism of and the Question Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 218.

as the appropriate method. However, Benhabib insists that their approach is, in fact, *not* postmodern, and she actually offers a perspective that is similar to theirs.

In *Social Criticism Without Philosophy*, Fraser/Nicholson assert that "a postmodern feminist theory need forswear neither large historical narratives nor analyses of societal macrostructures."[141] They argue that a postmodern feminist theory can attend to issues that transcend the merely local. However, they insist that such a theory ought to avoid seeking a basis that can unify disparate situations. When theory moves beyond any given culture or time period, it must strive to be comparativist rather than unifying. Thus, they argue, feminist theory should "tailor its methods and categories to the specific task at hand."[142] Furthermore, such analyses would deal with categories that are "genealogized, that is, framed by a historical narrative and rendered temporally and culturally specific."[143] For example, in examining categories such as reproduction or mothering, postmodern feminist theory would require analyses that include an examination of how such categories came to exist within specific historical and cultural situations.

Benhabib agrees with Fraser/Nicholson that "it is futile to seek to produce a single grand theory of female oppression and male dominance across cultures and societies."[144] Yet, in order to combat the oppression that does exist, she argues that feminist theory must maintain an interest in recovering the stories of groups and individuals who have been oppressed throughout history. Benhabib identifies this as a 'history-from-below'

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[141] Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism Without Philosophy," Feminism/Postmodernism, 34.
[142] Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy," Feminism/Postmodernism, 35.
[143] Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism Without Philosophy," Feminism/Postmodernism, 34.
[144] Benhabib, "Feminism of and the Question Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 219.

approach, "the task of which is to illuminate the gender, class, and race struggles through which power is negotiated, subverted as well as resisted by the so-called 'victims' of history."[145] She contrasts this with what she calls 'postmodern historiography'[146] which attends to the discursive regimes that create any given situation of oppression.

While both theoretical options hold promise for feminist theory, Benhabib asserts that postmodern historiography "emphasizes gender as 'difference,' marked by the otherness and absolute silencing of women."[147] That is, postmodern historiography understands history as the progression of competing discourses through which individuals and groups are constructed. This approach, Benhabib claims, does not enable women to tell their own stories, as they simply become constructs of the discursive regimes in which they are found. Therefore, Benhabib argues that engaged feminist theory requires the 'history-from-below' approach, so that we can arrive at a " 'feminist transvaluation of values' [through which] our *present* interest in women's strategies of survival and historical resistance has led us to imbue these *past* activities, which were wholly uninteresting from the standpoint of the traditional historian, with new meaning and signficance."[148]

So what of Fraser/Nicholson's postmodern feminist approach to history – does it not hold value for feminist practice? Benhabib is not explicitly opposed to the approach forwarded by Fraser/Nicholson, because, she insists, it is not actually postmodern. She

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[145] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 222.
[146] Benhabib attributes the postmodern historiographical approach, "in which the emphasis is on the 'construction' of the agency of the victims through mechanisms of social and discursive control," to Foucault. "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 222.
[147] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 222.
[148] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 220.

points out that "what they mean by this kind of theorizing is less 'postmodernist' but more 'neopragmatist'."[149] She interprets Fraser/Nicholson as adhering to neopragmatism because they have not foregone theory altogether, which is, according to Benhabib, one of the mandates of accepting the postmodern position. Moreover, their method of contextualizing said theory is representative of pragmatism, insofar as it stresses the relation of theory and praxis. Thus, we see that Benhabib and Fraser/Nicholson disagree more over appropriate terminology than they do regarding the role of history within contemporary feminism.

There are two sides to the debate regarding history. The first (Fraser/Nicholson) advocates a genealogization of categories within postmodern feminist analysis. The second (Benhabib) insists that feminism requires an interest in history, which seeks to recover the stories of actual women's lives so that they can be imparted with new meaning and significance.

3.1.3 Metaphysics: Fraser and Nicholson, Benhabib, and Harding

Finally, the role of metaphysics[150] is the site of a great deal of debate among feminist theorists. While all of the authors found in Chapter Two address this issue to some degree, I will focus on the works of Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, Seyla Benhabib, and Sandra Harding in this section to outline the debate. While Fraser/Nicholson contend that epistemology no longer retains any usefulness for feminist

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[149] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 220.
[150] Within post-Kantian critical discussion, metaphysics tends to become equated with epistemology. This is true particularly in light of Rorty's description of modern philosophy. Thus, because many of the authors discussed critique epistemology rather than metaphysics *qua* metaphysics, I will use these two terms interchangeably throughout the remainder of this thesis.

action, both Harding and Benhabib understand epistemology to be necessary to the functionality of feminist theory and politics. Harding strengthens her commitment to epistemology by grounding knowledge claims upon feminist science projects.

Fraser/Nicholson's examination of the feminist-postmodernist relationship is initiated by their accusation that "feminist scholarship has remained insufficiently attentive to the *theoretical* prerequisites of dealing with diversity, despite widespread commitment to accepting it politically."[151] In other words, they argue that feminist politics has taken to heart the lessons of cultural feminism by accommodating a multiplicity of perspectives. However, this does not mean that feminist theory has kept pace with its political practice. On the contrary, feminist theory, Fraser/Nicholson argue, has yet to produce a theoretical basis that can adequately explain the evolution that has taken place on the political front. Thus, they turn to postmodernism, believing that a postmodern feminist theory can address the practical needs of feminists.

This accommodation of difference motivates their eschewal of epistemology. In *Social Criticism Without Philosophy*, Fraser/Nicholson attempt to expose the hazards of invoking epistemological foundations within feminism. Their concern is that feminism, as social critic, loses its transformative powers when it relies upon traditional philosophical underpinnings. They claim that "Practical imperatives have led some feminists to adopt modes of theorizing which resemble the sorts of philosophical metanarrative rightly criticized by postmodernists."[152] Liberal and radical feminist

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[151] Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy," Feminism/Postmodernism, 33.
[152] Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy," Feminism/Postmodernism, 26.

theories, they insist, "assume methods and concepts which are uninflected by temporality or historicity and which therefore function *de facto* as permanent, neutral matrices for inquiry."[153]   Ultimately, Fraser/Nicholson insist that feminism and postmodernism are allies because "both have sought to develop new paradigms of social criticism which do not rely on traditional philosophical underpinnings."[154]

In direct opposition to the view espoused by Fraser/Nicholson, Benhabib's examination of the feminist debate over the role of epistemology asserts that "Social criticism without some form of philosophy is not possible, and without social criticism the project of a feminist theory which is at once committed to knowledge and to the emancipatory interests of women is inconceivable."[155]   She points out that "Social criticism needs philosophy precisely because the narratives of our cultures are so conflictual and irreconcilable that, even when one appeals to them, a certain ordering of one's normative priorities, a statement of methodological assumptions guiding one's choice of narratives, and a clarification of those principles in the name of which one speaks is unavoidable."[156]   In other words, the basis of social criticism is the ability to favour one particular description of the world.   Yet, in appealing to that specific description, it is necessary to justify that choice epistemologically.

According to Benhabib, it is possible to create "an epistemology and politics which recognizes the lack of metanarratives and foundational guarantees but which nonetheless insists on formulating minimal criteria of validity for our discursive and

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153   Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy," Feminism/Postmodernism, 27.
154   Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism Without Philosophy," Feminism/Postmodernism, 19.
155   Benhabib, Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 225.
156   Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 226.

political practices."[157] In other words, it is possible to avoid the pitfalls associated with metanarrative, but still retain an epistemological basis for political action. This is accomplished by way of communicative action, which maintains that discourse provides a basis for justifying norms.[158]

In *Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques*, Harding argues that, "when traditional grounds for knowledge claims are not available, there is not only the problem of justifying one's claims to others, but also the problem of justifying them to oneself and to those who might prove sympathetic to feminist goals."[159] That is, feminists require an epistemological basis upon which they can ground both their claims and their choices.

However, this epistemological basis is not that which is conceived by modern philosophy. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, the feminist science projects that are presented by Harding destabilize the epistemological framework that traditionally grounded knowledge claims. By situating the knowing subject, both feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint theory develop new justificatory strategies, thereby pushing traditional science beyond the boundaries of modern thought. Therefore, feminists in the scientific traditions are uniquely capable of developing new explanations which will point the way to improving the conditions of women. More specifically, feminist science projects are able to "bring to consciousness less mystified understandings of women's

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[157] Benhabib, "Epistemologies of Postmodernism," <u>Feminism/Postmodernism</u>, 125.
[158] I do not want to delve too deeply into Habermas' concept of discourse, which Benhabib employs here. For further discussion of this topic, see Jurgen Habermas, <u>The Theory of Communicative Action</u>.
[159] Harding, "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques," <u>Feminism/Postmodernism</u>, 89.

and men's situations so that these understandings can energize and direct women and men to struggle on behalf of eliminating the subordination of women."[160]

These are the three sides of the debate regarding epistemology. The first (Fraser/Nicholson) is a postmodern feminist theory that forswears allegiance to epistemological bases. The second (Benhabib) insists that feminism, as a form of social criticism, must maintain epistemology in order to guide choices in feminist political practice. The third (Harding) also argues that epistemology is necessary for feminism, and insists that feminist science projects can develop new justificatory strategies that can be employed to ground this epistemology, and hence, feminist political action.

3.2 Resolution

If postmodernism is to be wholly adopted by feminists, then the linguistic turn must also be adopted. To be a postmodernist is to take up the linguistic turn. Do feminist theorists who wish to ally with postmodernism adopt the imperatives of the linguistic turn? Let me turn to an analysis of the tensions just outlined in light of the linguistic turn. In so doing, I will demonstrate that, even those feminists who insist upon adopting postmodernism in forwarding the goals of feminism, adhere to pre-linguistic turn philosophical and methodological assumptions. If feminist theorists better understood the linguistic turn, then the tensions that have emerged among them may be diffused.

First, allow me to provide a brief overview of the linguistic turn. Recall, from Chapter One, that ordinary language philosophers "Do no think that when we say

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[160] Harding, "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques," Feminism/Postmodernism, 90.

something we must necessarily be expressing a view about a subject. We might just be *saying something* – participating in a conversation rather than contributing to an inquiry. Perhaps saying things is not always saying how things are."[161] Thus, language is no longer representative; it is not understood as a medium designed to either represent external reality or to express inner states. Rather, language is performative, and philosophical difficulties of the sort that characterize modern philosophy arise only when words are 'performed' incorrectly. Thus, by examining how language is ordinarily used, such difficulties can be either solved or dissolved.

I have suggested that an analysis of the linguistic turn can help to resolve some of the tensions that I have just outlined. In order for the linguistic turn to prove helpful in resolving these tensions, it must either demonstrate that one side of the tension is more right (or more wrong) than the others, or show the way to a common ground between the various sides of the debate. In each case, we find that analyzing the turn does in fact point us in a specific direction. While it cannot be safely asserted that this is the final word on the topic, I maintain that this analysis does prove to be instructive when attempting to navigate the difficult terrain of the feminist-postmodernist debate.

3.2.1 The Subject and the Linguistic Turn

As I have already demonstrated, there are three sides to the debate regarding subjectivity. By examining these positions with reference to the linguistic turn, we will see that the tension among Flax, Di Stefano and Benhabib can be more clearly understood, and, perhaps, even resolved. What this analysis reveals is that Flax, who has

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[161] Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, 371.

made the linguistic turn, does not actually take it as far as postmodernism, although she claims that her position is a type of postmodern philosophy. Di Stefano strongly adheres to pre-linguistic turn understandings of the self, although she inadvertently reveals that such a position is no longer viable. Benhabib, who has also made the linguistic turn, is correct in claiming that her understanding of subjectivity is neither modern nor postmodern.

Despite what conclusions the linguistic turn yields for postmodernists, it remains the case that the philosophical method introduced by the turn is to examine language in use. The critique of representational knowledge suggests that our words and expressions do not point to something in the world. Thus, when we speak of the 'self,' we are referring neither to a metaphysical substance nor to a clearly-defined empirical entity. Similarly, when we speak of 'woman,' there is no clearly-delineated category represented by the word. Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblances demonstrates that categories are not clearly circumscribed, but rather that we employ words to identify similarities between spheres of experience. Neither 'self' nor 'woman' designates an essential unity, nor do these terms point us toward some identifiable human nature.

Does Flax's conception of postmodern subjectivity adhere to this dictate? Flax argues that "Subjectivity is not an illusion, but the subject *is* a shifting and always changing intersection of complex, contradictory, and unfinished processes."[162] That is, the modern, unitary and ahistorical self is replaced by fluid and multiple subjectivities, which cannot be circumscribed by any essential definition. It is obvious, then, that Flax

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[162] Flax, <u>Disputed Subjects</u>, 108.

does take the linguistic turn seriously in her construction of postmodern subjectivity. However, she claims that this subject also possesses "capacities for abstract thought, work, and language; aggression; creativity; fantasy; meaning creation; and objectivity."[163] Thus, we see that Flax's subject still retains control over language. Yet, according to postmodernism, the subject is an *effect* of discourse, and no longer the creator of it. Flax's conception of subjectivity that is capable of creating meaning and attaining objectivity is clearly at odds with the postmodern death of the Subject. Thus, Flax's desire to maintain a subject who is capable of transforming her world, and her desire to attend to the difficulties of difference raised by feminist politics, cause her postmodern philosophy to be self-contradictory.

What of Flax's broader assertion, that "none of us can speak for 'woman' because no such person exists"?[164] Again, Flax has clearly appropriated the lessons of the linguistic turn in her analysis of the complexities of gender relations. She argues that "gender relations thus have no fixed essence; they vary both within and over time."[165] Yet Flax also insists that, "by studying gender we hope to gain a critical distance on existing gender arrangements. This critical distance can help clear a space in which reevaluating and altering our existing gender arrangements may become more possible."[166] How, one may ask, is this critical distance achieved if the inquiring and critically-reflective subject is mired within gender relations, and ultimately within language? It is clearly the case that Flax's desire to maintain a feminist theory and

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[163] Flax, Disputed Subjects, 106.
[164] Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations," Feminism/Postmodernism, 56.
[165] Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations," Feminism/Postmodernism, 40.
[166] Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations," Feminism/Postmodernism, 40.

political practice with social critical force does not lead her to the conclusion of postmodernism. Although she argues that, "As a type of postmodern philosophy, feminist theory reveals and contributes to the growing uncertainty within Western intellectual circles about the appropriate grounding and methods for explaining and interpreting human experience,"[167] Flax's reliance upon pre-linguistic turn understandings of subjectivity indicates that feminist theory is not, in this case, a type of postmodern philosophy. Rather, feminist theory and postmodernism offer parallel critiques of traditional views of the self that do not converge.

Di Stefano, who argues against a feminist alliance with postmodernism, claims that the fracturing of identity and the idea of a solidarity of opposition will necessarily undermine the feminist normative vision. She claims that "For the time being, then, postmodernism is as entrenched in the dilemmas of difference as are the modernist and anti-modernist alternatives."[168] That is, the reduction of the unified self into fractured identities, she argues, causes us to lose sight of 'woman,' and, consequently, of a movement dedicated to her emancipation. Thus, she identifies gender "as a recurring paradox, question, dead end, or blind spot to which we must repeatedly return,"[169] Di Stefano seems to imply that closer investigation may help us to define or understand gender once and for all.

However, Di Stefano further points out that the study of gender is not only empirical, but theoretical and normative as well. That is, she claims, "in asking how

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[167] Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations," Feminism/Postmodernism, 40-41.
[168] Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," Feminism/Postmodernism, 77.
[169] Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," Feminism/Postmodernism, 78

basic gender differences *are*, we are also asking how basic we want them to be."[170] This assertion, while certainly pragmatic, reveals a tension between empirical and theoretical elements of the study of gender. This tension reveals that Di Stefano's argument is itself conflicted regarding our role in the construction of gender, and the ability to discover such differences in order to employ them within political practice. While Di Stefano does not offer a thorough examination or explanation of how these two elements can co-exist, it is clear that she has not taken the lessons of the linguistic turn to heart, and this causes difficulty for her.

Finally, Benhabib's radically situated self is a product of post-linguistic turn thinking. She claims that subjects are not disembodied cogitos or abstract unities of transcendental apperception,"[171] but rather that the subject is "an embodied and embedded human self whose identity is constituted narratively."[172] Thus, it is clear that the subject, on Benhabib's account, is constituted by discourse. However, because Benhabib is adamant that the subject is not *determined* by discourse, her appropriation of the linguistic turn does not bring her in line with postmodernism. She explicitly denies that postmodern concepts of subjectivity hold any promise for feminist organizing because they undermine the subject's ability to take part in rational discourse. Thus, Benhabib's conception of subjectivity is situated between the modern, understood as pre-linguistic turn philosophy, and postmodernism.

Benhabib also asserts that the task of identifying how to use the word 'woman' is

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[170] Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," Feminism/Postmodernism, 66.
[171] Benhabib, "Introduction," Situating the Self, 5.
[172] Benhabib, "Introduction," Situating the Self, 6.

best left to the social scientist. That is, she insists that the categories of social research "cannot be determined by epistemological arguments extraneous to the task at hand."[173] Thus, the boundaries between philosophy and the social sciences, she argues, ought to be re-evaluated. Does this undermine the efficacy of a politics based on the emancipation of woman? Are we restricted in our ability to speak on her behalf because we don't know, once and for all, who she is? The inability to define woman once and for all does not preclude us from employing the term or category for specific purposes. While this may have been the point of Di Stefano's claim that the study of gender is both empirical and normative, she was unable to hold this position consistently because she still held to the dictates of representational knowledge. However, Benhabib's post-linguistic turn, but not postmodernist position, enables her to hold this hypothesis without contradiction. Because the social scientist is able to define 'woman' according to her needs, she is not restricted to an essential definition. Yet, Benhabib's maintenance of the rational, autonomous individual allows her to use this knowledge for political ends.

3.2.2   History & The Linguistic Turn

I have shown that there are two sides to the debate regarding history. An examination of this debate in light of the linguistic turn once again clarifies where Fraser/Nicholson and Benhabib are actually situated. The understanding of history as proposed by Fraser/Nicholson's postmodern feminist theory is not actually postmodern, and, because of their rejection of epistemology (which will be explained in further detail in the section 3.2.3), raises serious questions as to whether they have even made the

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[173] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Situating the Self, 220.

linguistic turn. On the other hand, Benhabib's history-from-below approach, which is not postmodern, does take into account the imperatives of the linguistic turn.

Benhabib is correct in her assertion that Fraser/Nicholson's 'even-handed and commonsensical approach to tailoring theory to the tasks at hand is not postmodernist."[174] I agree with Benhabib that their approach is not postmodernist, although I arrive at this conclusion by way of a different route. While Benhabib argues that Fraser/Nicholson's approach is more pragmatic than it is postmodernist, I argue that it is not postmodernist because their approach raises the question of whether they have determined a sufficient method, beyond the episteme of representation, for judging various genealogies.

Fraser/Nicholson argue that the categories of postmodern feminist analysis should be genealogized. Politically, this approach "seeks to 'establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today'."[175] While this approach to interpreting history does in fact avoid the entanglements that accompany teleological metanarratives, it does not offer a way of evaluating the different genealogies with which one may be presented.

Within feminist theory, we are faced with the idea that interpreting the past still depends upon examining how things were. While it is possible that large historical narratives within feminism can be pragmatic and fallibilistic, with methods tailored to a specific task, they are still created with the intention of reaching a specific goal. If the

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[174] Benhabib, "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," Feminism/Postmodernism, 220.
[175] Lee Quinby, "Genealogical Feminism: a Politic Way of Looking," Feminism and the New Democracy: Re-siting the Political, ed. Jodi Dean. (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1997) 146.

critical force of feminism relies, in part, upon interpreting the past while being ever mindful of the imperatives of genealogy, how does one evaluate varied interpretations or genealogies? Fraser/Nicholson do not deny that there is a moral-political imperative in place that guides feminist theory. Their desire is to "conceive a version of criticism without philosophy which is robust enough to handle the tough job of analyzing sexism in all its endless variety and monotonous similarity."[176] However, as demonstrated in section 3.1.3, Fraser/Nicholson reject epistemology outright, and thus do not offer any way of dealing with the problem of judging various, and potentially conflictual, genealogies.

Given that Fraser/Nicholson's postmodern feminist theory does not offer a basis upon which various genealogies can be interpreted, perhaps the only option they are left with is to interpret them by evaluating which is more accurate. That is, which narrative more accurately represents the truth than the others. If this is the case, (and granted, Fraser/Nicholson would likely deny this reading) then Fraser/Nicholson's political commitments are clearly at odds with their postmodernism. Fraser/Nicholson may be able to sidestep this concern by claiming that Benhabib is in fact right, and that they are actually advocating a version of pragmatism rather than postmodernism. Yet the following question remains to be asked: can a political movement that seeks to create real change, and that seeks to convince others that such change is needed, rely on these sorts of pragmatic foundations? Is it enough to act politically on stories 'as if' they point to how things 'really were'?

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[176] Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy," <u>Feminism/Postmodernism</u>, 34.

It is clear that the role of history within Fraser/Nicholson's postmodern feminist theory indicates that they have not fully adopted the postmodern position. Moreover, because they do not offer any sort of basis upon which to judge various genealogies, it is quite possible that they have yet to take leave of the imperatives of the episteme of representation. Ironically, they fall victim to their own accusation that "feminist critics continue tacitly to rely on the sorts of philosophical underpinnings which their own commitments, like those of the postmodernists, ought in principle to rule out."[177]

Rather than asserting a postmodern position in relation to history, Benhabib's history-from-below approach is designed to allow room for the feminist transvaluation of values. However, because Benhabib's approach allows room for an epistemological framework according to which various interpretations of history can be favoured, she manages to avoid the difficulty that plagues Fraser/Nicholson's position. If we are to create a politics of emancipation based, in part, upon the appropriation of women's stories, how are we to judge those stories? Benhabib, who does not reject epistemology, but rather embraces the potential of communicative action, is able to account for this need to justify which narrative is chosen.

3.2.3   Metaphysics & The Linguistic Turn

There are three sides to the debate regarding metaphysics. An examination of these positions in light of the linguistic turn will demonstrate that the tension among Fraser/Nicholson, Benhabib and Harding can be mitigated. We will see that Fraser/Nicholson's postmodern feminist theory retains vestiges of representational

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[177] Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy," Feminism/Postmodernism, 20.

thought. Benhabib, who has self-consciously accepted the linguistic turn, searches for an alternate epistemological basis for feminist political practice, thus forgoing the option of postmodernism. Harding, who is opposed to postmodernism but sees value in its criticisms, remains decidedly modern due to her reliance upon traditional scientific goals and methods, and consequently, the episteme of representation.

The role of epistemology within feminist theory is perhaps the most difficult terrain to navigate, but it is important to keep in mind the dictates of the linguistic turn. The linguistic turn called for the end of the episteme of representation. In other words, the epistemological system that characterized the entirety of philosophical history from Descartes through to the Enlightenment was thought to have ended. Regardless of what postmodernists seek to replace this episteme with, the linguistic turn dictated that language could no longer be understood as a medium of representation. Recall that "saying something does not necessarily mean we are expressing a view about a subject."[178] Thus, because any postmodern position necessarily involves an appropriation of this view, it is important to determine whether or not any feminist theorist who claims to be postmodernist does, in fact, avoid representationalism.

As previously mentioned, Fraser/Nicholson's desire to accomodate difference motivates their eschewal of epistemology. But, they also insist that "a phenomenon as pervasive and multifaceted as male dominance cannot be adequately grasped with the meager critical resources to which [the postmodernists] would limit us."[179] Thus, their

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[178] Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, 371.
[179] Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy," Feminism/Postmodernism, 26.

postmodern feminist theory is tailored to serve two functions: 1. To meet the political demands of cultural feminism, and 2. To maintain a critical social theory that can "handle the tough job of analyzing sexism in all its endless variety and monotonous similarity."[180] However, does their deployment of large theoretical tools adhere to the dictates of the linguistic turn? As I pointed out in the previous section, Fraser/Nicholson run into troubles with regards to their understanding of history. In that case, their rejection of epistemology meant that they were unable to judge between various genealogies, and were, potentially, left to rely upon the episteme of representation to determine their choices. If we carry this criterion over to the realm of epistemology, the following question must be asked: if we no longer maintain some method of choosing between narratives, then what becomes of the feminist normative vision?

However, the difficulty with Fraser/Nicholson's postmodern feminist theory begins even before this. They write, "Suppose one began, not with the condition of Philosophy, but with the nature of the social object one wished to criticize. Suppose, further, that one defined that object as the subordination of women to and by men."[181] Thus, Fraser/Nicholson assume, *a priori*, that there exists a social object to criticize, namely, the subordination of women. In other words, they argue that it is true that women are subordinated by men. How, one may ask, are they able to make this assertion if their position is truly postmodern?

In opposition to Fraser/Nicholson, Benhabib rejects postmodernism outright.

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[180] Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy," Feminism/Postmodernism, 34.
[181] Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy," Feminism/Postmodernism, 26.

However, she also self-consciously indicates that feminists have moved beyond the episteme of representation. That is, she articulates, in no uncertain terms, that she has made the linguistic turn. The summary of Benhabib's position in regards to the self in section 3.2.1, has already demonstrated this fact, and hence I will not revisit it here. However, it is important to note that she insists that working within the horizon of the linguistic turn does not necessitate a move toward postmodernism. Rather, she asks, "What are the epistemological options opened by the demise of the classical episteme of representation?"[182] Whatever they may be, she adds that "it is necessary that we think the epistemic alternatives created by the present...to their moral and political ends."[183]

Harding, who also argues against a feminist alliance with postmodernism, does so because she holds that feminists need an epistemological basis upon which to ground their claims and choices. However, upon examining her position in light of the linguistic turn, we see that, in a very important sense, she does not necessarily leave behind the imperatives of the episteme of representation. That is, her belief that science, and even feminist science projects, can underwrite the possibility of political action, represents an adherence to representational thought. Harding's goal is to "defend the viability and progressiveness of the feminist science and epistemology projects against their postmodernist critics."[184] They ought to be defended, she claims, because "they envision emancipatory possibilities for the harnessing of power to knowledge."[185]

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[182] Benhabib, "Epistemologies of Postmodernism," Feminism/Postmodernism, 109.
[183] Benhabib, "Epistemologies of Postmodernism," Feminism/Postmodernism 124.
[184] Harding, "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques," Feminism/Postmodernism, 83.
[185] Harding, "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques," Feminism/Postmodernism, 83.

Thus, Harding not only believes that epistemology is needed to ground political choices and actions, but also that science can help inform these choices. Implicit within these claims seems to be the idea that science can help us to discover truth, and thus help us appropriately determine our actions. Harding attempts to sidestep this concern by claiming that feminist science projects can "aim to produce less partial and perverse representations without having to assert the absolute, complete, universal, or eternal adequacy of these representations."[186] However, although she argues that truth and falsity may not constitute opposite ends of the same spectrum,[187] she does not go on to develop this line of argument. This is surprising considering that, of the many challenges that her feminist science projects face, the idea that both feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint theory still strive toward truth is likely the most contentious. For the time being, then, it is safe to assume that Harding's adherence to science and epistemology not only place her before postmodernism, but before the linguistic turn itself.

Conclusion

As Benhabib points out, "The struggle over what lies beyond the classical imperative remains unresolved."[188] It is clear that, thus far, the choices are limited such that feminists are often forced to embrace postmodernism, even though I have shown that

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[186] Harding, "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques," Feminism/Postmodernism, 100.
[187] Harding borrows this idea from Thomas Kuhn, who "argued that it would be better to understand the history of science in terms of increasing distance from falsity rather than closeness to truth." (Harding, 100) Harding contends that such a revolutionary idea in the history of science can likely be seen as an option within feminist theory as well. However, she devotes less than a paragraph to this idea, which is, I think, a shortcoming within her defense of feminist science projects, and why I have chosen to focus on it here.
[188] Benhabib, "Epistemologies of Postmodernism," Feminism/Postmodernism, 125.

such an alliance seems to be in name only. While it is certainly true that "feminists, like other theorists, work today in a context marked by the problematization of language,"[189] feminist theorists, because of their feminism, are unable follow this assumption through to the 'conclusion of postmodernism.' Are other alternatives possible? To be a postmodernist is to embrace the linguistic turn. Is it the case that embracing the linguistic turn requires one to be postmodern?

Chapter Three has suggested that an examination of various feminist theories in light of the linguistic turn can help clear the cluttered terrain of the feminist-postmodernist debate. Indeed, this analysis has revealed that some feminist theorists (at least those outlined here) still cling to the ideals of modern philosophy and the episteme of representation. The desire to create an effective political movement seems to be incompatible with a complete adoption of the postmodern position. In the case of some of the feminist theorists outlined, it even seems to hinder the rejection of representational knowledge.

The need to maintain a subject who is able to shape the world through language; the desire to interpret history with an eye toward improving the situation of women; and the imperative of maintaining an ability to justify one's actions and choices; all inhibit the complete rejection of epistemology. Does this mean that no other epistemology is possible? Is it not possible to be a feminist after the linguistic turn?

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[189] Nancy Fraser, "Pragmatism, Feminism, and the Linguistic Turn," 157.

CONCLUSION

I began this project with the goal of determining whether an examination of the feminist-postmodernist debate in light of the linguistic turn's role in the development of postmodernism would help to resolve some of the tensions that have plagued the relationship between feminism and postmodernism from its very beginnings. Such an analysis has revealed that feminist theorists are situated at various locations in relation to the linguistic turn and its imperatives.

Some theorists claim to be postmodernist, but contradict themselves by retaining some form of epistemology, some even adhering to the dictates of representational knowledge. Others refuse both the linguistic turn and postmodernism, preferring to maintain feminist political practice from within the modern philosophical system. Still others, who have self-consciously made the linguistic turn, do not want to risk an alliance with postmodernism, and thus seek an alternate epistemological basis upon which the normative vision and social-critical force of feminism can be based.

I ended Chapter Three with the following questions: Does the end of the episteme of representation mean that no other epistemology is possible? Is it not possible to be a feminist after the linguistic turn? While I can make no claim to offering the final answer at this point, I believe that this thesis has demonstrated that there are two imperatives in place for feminist theory: 1. Feminism cannot follow the linguistic turn through to the 'conclusion of postmodernism.' Attempts to do so have resulted in ironically self-contradictory and self-refuting positions. Moreover, the lack of epistemology entailed by the postmodern position runs too high a risk for feminist political practice. 2. That

feminists must make the linguistic turn is inevitable. Similar to the Cartesian subjective turn or to Kant's Copernican revolution, the linguistic turn was a revolution within contemporary philosophy from which there is no turning back. The episteme of representation has been shown to be lacking, and this perhaps more so for feminism than for any other theoretical concern.

In order to live up to these two imperatives, feminism must search for a new and alternate epistemology, one that will allow the transformative powers of feminism to continue. What this new epistemology is cannot be answered here, although it is clear that the feminist theorists who have been analysed in this thesis offer a number of opportunities for the future. The debate between feminism and postmodernism is yet in its infancy. Thus, it is likely that the debate and discussion will continue, and that even more opportunities will present themselves. If feminist theorists, along with their political counterparts, indeed seek the emancipation of women, then doubtless such discussions, in which there is so much at stake, will persist for many years to come.

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