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## Introduction

### How to Do (Feminist) Things with Words<sup>1</sup>

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**E**lissa Marder writes in regard to feminism that “its necessity, its reason for being as discursive praxis, is as political response.”<sup>2</sup> If feminism is irreducibly political, and if, as Marder claims, “[t]o intervene politically is to speak punctually, performatively, and strategically,” then the words of feminists may need to be more than mere lifeless vehicles for the communication of ideas. Language is sometimes characterized as reflective, as a neutral mirror for an objective reality. But feminist language, if it is to effect social and political change, must be active—we must use feminist words to *do* things. This collection of essays is devoted to exploring the possibilities of using language as an important means for reaching feminist goals of liberation. These diverse essays criticize theories of language that suppose it to express rigid, closed truths about reality. Instead, the authors here emphasize the *creative* capacity of language, its ability to help shape our conceptions of self and of the world. They urge that attention to language must be an important part of any feminist political agenda, and they share a confidence in the power of language to help liberate women from oppressive circumstances and identities. The authors in this anthology each show, in different ways, how words can also be deeds.

This collection is divided into four parts. The first, entitled “The Power of Words: Changing Meanings, Changing Social Spaces,” addresses the possibility that changing the way we use language may have profound effects in a larger social context. The essays by Lynne Tirrell, Sara Mills, Jane Hedley, and Georganna Ulary each consider different ways of using words in pursuit of liberation. The

essays in the second section, entitled “The Power to Speak: Who Is Speaking, from Where?” consider how changes in language use may affect not only the social and political status of women, but also their very identity. Of major concern in this context are questions involving both the “we” of feminist group identity as well as the “I” of individual identity. For example, how might feminists use terms such as “women” and “feminists” in ways that preserve their strategic power while avoiding their oppressive exclusionary potential? In addition, should feminists try to avoid presenting a singular, uniform notion of individual identity, since this may form an oppressive notion of self? The essays by Elissa Marder, Susan David Bernstein, and Sangeeta Ray address such concerns by considering uses of language that facilitate an openness to difference and change rather than emphasizing a closed, exclusionary view of identity. The authors in the third section, “The Power of Masculinist Metaphors: Words that Keep Women in Place,” emphasize the power of metaphor to shape our conceptions of, and accepted truths about, the world. Natalie Alexander, Andrea Nye, and Roberta Weston each analyze the metaphors used by prominent philosophers and consider the consequences of these metaphors in a feminist context. The fourth section, “The Power of Feminist Metaphors: Words That Open Spaces for Women,” focuses on the ways that metaphors can be deployed to meet feminist ends. Ewa Płonowska Ziarek, Lisa Walsh, and Cynthia Baker each address the power and pitfalls of using feminist metaphors of fluidity and maternity.

The essays in this collection span not only a range of topics in the vast area of feminism and language, but also a range of philosophical approaches. In order to help bring together such diversity as part of a larger, feminist concern with language, this Introduction provides some historical background for the issues addressed in each of the four parts. In the Introduction we present a short overview of the literature forming the background for the current work presented in this collection. We consider the crucial questions and issues at stake in each of the four parts, situating these essays in the history of the field and showing how they take older inquiries into important new directions. The Introduction is therefore divided into four sections paralleling the divisions of the book, and a short description of the essays in each part is included.

Part I  
*The Power of Words:  
Changing Meanings, Changing Social Spaces*

The essays in the first part of this volume address how changes in language use might affect women's circumstances and identities. An important question in such discussions is whether or not there is a difference in language use between men and women. In other words, is it possible to distinguish a kind of "female" language from a "male" one? Among those feminists who have answered this question in the affirmative, there are differences of opinion as to what should be done about it.<sup>3</sup> Some, such as Robin Lakoff, argue that women's speech exhibits a powerlessness that is detrimental to feminist goals, and that women should therefore try to adopt the more powerful speech patterns used by men.<sup>4</sup> Others, such as Dale Spender and Luce Irigaray, claim that women's language needs to be reclaimed and valorized because its use may help us to avoid some of the oppressive tendencies of the language developed by males. The issues presented in the following brief, historical account of this debate underlie the work being done now on the power of words to change women's social circumstances, as presented in the first part of this collection. These essays extend, refuse, and/or go beyond many of the questions considered by feminist language theorists in the past.

Robin Lakoff, Casey Miller, Kate Swift, and Cheris Kramarae published empirical studies in the 1970s and '80s suggesting the existence of a specifically feminine way of using language. Following roughly the methods of the American structuralists studying Native American languages in the 1950s, they gathered samples from women and catalogued them in order to determine patterns in sounds, words, and grammatical structures, as well as conventions for the distribution of these fundamental elements. But unlike the American structuralists, Lakoff, Miller/Swift, and Kramarae did not work from a random sampling of the group of speakers under investigation. Rather, as part of the sociolinguistic movement of the 1960s, they proceeded under the claim that random sampling smoothes over the differences in language use corresponding to social categories such as race, class, and gender. These feminists argued that there is an important relationship between

language use and social status, and they brought such social differences to the fore in their works. They focused on specific, non-random groups of women and determined how their speech differed from what was considered the (male) norm.

These theorists reported that women did indeed use language in a significantly different way than men. In *Language and Woman's Place*, Lakoff argues that " 'Women's language' shows up in all levels of the grammar of English" (Lakoff 1975, 8). She finds that in general women are more likely than men to use "tag" questions, "hedges," and "super polite" forms as devices for deferring to men and avoiding responsibility. The use of "tag" questions is a linguistic tactic that combines an assertion with a yes-or-no question, such as: "The movie does start at seven-thirty, doesn't it?" Such questions suggest that the speaker is sure enough about the answer to avoid asking for information, yet unsure enough to require confirmation from a respondent. Lakoff suggests that this move, though it can signal a desire to avoid conflict within discourse, can also give the impression of powerlessness. In addition, "hedging," or being overly "polite" may reinforce a view of women as lacking in confidence, as being afraid to express their own views (or perhaps even as incapable of *having* views of their own). Lakoff argues that such differences in language use between men and women provides "black and white" evidence of sexism (Lakoff 1975, 4).

This discrepancy in language use between the sexes is, however, a complex problem for which Lakoff does not provide a clear solution in her work. On the one hand, she proposes that women give up their "lady-like" language, but on the other she seems also to argue that this "feminine" language is symptomatic of a more pervasive sexism that cannot be eliminated by a simple change in word use. Still, even if women's language alone doesn't cause sexism, Lakoff suggests that it does perpetuate it. Discrepancies in language use between men and women may be rooted in deep biological, sociopolitical, and economic relations, but "[t]he ultimate effect of these discrepancies is that women are systematically denied access to power, on the grounds that they are not capable of holding it as demonstrated by their linguistic behavior . . ." (Lakoff 1975, 7). To help break the cycle, Lakoff urges women to adopt the language used by people in power (men). Though this step may not be enough to gain women immediate access to power, Lakoff seems to be saying that it will at least remove one of the hindrances to

it. Thus, for Lakoff, it seems a change in language use has the potential to change women's social status in a limited way.

In *Words and Women*, Casey Miller and Kate Swift also suggest that a change in language use will lead to a change in the social position of women (Miller and Swift 1977). They argue that our language is riddled with sexist elements that work to suppress the role of women in society. Miller/Swift catalogue the sexism in our language (such as idioms, derogatory terms associated with women, and the generic use of "he" and "man") and conclude that the rejection of such elements will lead to more accuracy in language use. For example, both men and women participate in human activities, but the use of the generic "he/man" does not reflect this. Further, the use of such pronouns can perpetuate sexist circumstances by supporting the view that he/man constitutes "humanity," from which she/woman is excluded. Miller/Swift argue that any change in language use that will "contribute to clarity and accuracy" rather than "fudge them" should be made.

Cheris Kramarae follows the sociolinguistic tradition in finding differences between women's and men's speech, arguing that differences in the use of language reflect differences in social status (Kramarae 1981).<sup>5</sup> Kramarae endorses what she calls the "strategy model" of language: she maintains that variations in language use develop as strategies for dealing with social situations. For women, this means that differences between their speech and that of men is the result of adaptive behavior through which women learn to operate within oppressive social circumstances. Experiencing a deficiency of social power in relation to that of men, women learn to use different language strategies in order to exercise what power they do have. For Kramarae, language itself is not responsible for women's oppression, it is merely a reflection of that oppression. Moreover, language is a useful strategic tool for operating within an oppressive culture. This picture of feminine speech seems more positive than that presented by Lakoff, for it accords women's language some strategic value. Still, Kramarae finds feminine language to be powerless in comparison to that of men.<sup>6</sup>

English feminist Dale Spender uses similar empirical research methods to theorize differences between the speech of men and women. In *Man Made Language* Spender shows how a change in language use might lead to a change in women's social position, and she makes an important step toward revaluing "feminine"

speech rather than declaring it inferior to its masculine counterpart (Spender 1980). Spender's research is situated within a Marxist framework, and she thus interprets language as both a cause of oppression and a symptom of the greater material conditions of patriarchal capitalism.

Spender adheres to what is known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, maintaining that language plays a powerful role in shaping human perceptions of reality.<sup>7</sup> She argues that language, rather than being a neutral vehicle that communicates already-formed ideas, works instead to shape our ideas about the world. Language is very influential in shaping the way we organize and understand reality, according to Spender: "Once certain categories are constructed within the language, we proceed to organize the world according to those categories. We even fail to see evidence which is not consistent with those categories" (Spender 1980, 141). Language for Spender is therefore "both a creative and an inhibiting vehicle," organizing our experience of the world and discouraging change. Those who control language therefore also control perceptions of reality—which puts them in a very powerful position, since for Spender there is nothing more to "reality" than our view of it.

According to Spender, men form a dominant group that has controlled language in its own interest, constructing sexist categories and meanings through which all speakers of the language view the world.<sup>8</sup> The inhibiting nature of these categories makes it difficult to change the perception of women as "inferior" to men. Spender argues that the categories set up by male-dominated language make claims to objectivity and truth, as if they were simply "the way things are." Clearly, it is in the interest of the dominant group for their views to be regarded as transcendent truths, untouchable and inalterable. Yet Spender maintains that there is a feminine alternative: she claims that women's language organizes the world differently than the dominant male one, because it does away with oppositional categories such as "masculine" and "feminine." This new, non-dualistic language, according to Spender, will help to usher in a new, non-dualistic way for us to view the world and each other. Spender therefore suggests that we dismantle our traditional, "man-made" language and articulate that of women instead.

Spender's analysis offers the advantage over those discussed above by explaining more precisely how and why a change in lan-



guage use could lead to a change in the social status of women. If the categories of language do indeed shape our experience, then perhaps by changing language structures we could ultimately change social structures. Further, Spender attempts to valorize the speech of women, arguing that it is not, in itself, powerless and weak, but only appears so in the context of the dominant male language.<sup>9</sup>

A recent contribution to this debate has been made by the French feminist and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray. Irigaray has also done empirical linguistic studies on the differences between men's and women's speech, and has published some of her findings in *I Love to You* (Irigaray 1996). There, she claims that women's use of language is directed toward a communicative function, while men's language use focuses on possession and manipulation of objects. Women, seeking dialogue, are frustrated in their linguistic exchanges with men, who concern themselves not with *who* is speaking, but rather with *what* is being spoken about. But such a focus on the objects spoken about draws attention away from the subject(s) involved in conversation, and therefore the subjectivity of the other tends to be ignored. In other words, the male language use, which emphasizes objective reality and truth, detracts from communication between subjects.

The problem cannot simply be remedied, however, by using a female language, emphasizing communication between subjects. According to Irigaray, communication can only take place if there is a recognized difference between subjects. *Recognition*, for Irigaray, requires an understanding of the irreducible difference between myself and another: "I recognize you goes hand in hand with: you are irreducible to me, just as I am to you. We may not be substituted for one another" (Irigaray 1996, 103). If I *recognize* another subject, this means that the other is never fully transparent to me. We can never fuse into a *one*, but will always remain separated by a mystery that incites dialogue. This irreducible difference is a necessary condition for communication between subjects—I can only talk *with* another if I *recognize* the other as separated from me by an insurmountable difference.

Irigaray locates the irreducible difference necessary for communication in sexual difference: "As for the opening up of this field [of communication], the relation between man and woman is paradigmatic" (Irigaray 1996, 46); and speaking of difference that is irreducible, Irigaray claims that "[o]nly the recognition of the other as

sexed offers this possibility” (Irigaray 1996, 105). She argues that the “I,” rather than being a neutral, all-encompassing “one,” is always sexed, and ignoring this leads to a covering over of difference, an impossibility of “we.” Irigaray suggests that we consider the otherwise gender-neutral “I” as rather “he” or “she,” in order to bring out the otherness that is found within sexual difference. We can thereby avoid, she argues, the collapsing of this difference into a neutral oneness, an objective notion of subjectivity that can easily be used to exclude anyone who does not fit its parameters. This, of course, is what has happened to women: we have become the *other* of men, “the other of the Same.” Women serve as mute exchange-value between men rather than as equal partners in exchanges, whether social, economic, political, or linguistic. Becoming an equal partner means having an equal, *female* and therefore *different* identity and subjectivity.<sup>11</sup>

Accomplishing this may require different strategies, but one way involves changing our language. Irigaray argues that a new kind of syntax may be required, a “syntax of communication” that facilitates and maintains links between subjects who see each other as different. The title of her book provides one example of such a syntax: “*I love to you* means I maintain a relation of indirection to you. I do not subordinate you or consume you. . . . I speak to you, not just about something; rather I speak *to* you” (Irigaray 1996, 109). Irigaray argues that such changes in language use could have important social and political effects. For example, she claims that simply using feminine pronouns more often (i.e., *she/they*, where the latter refers to a group of women—in French, *elles*) “alters our customs without our being aware of it. . . .” (Irigaray 1996, 133). Irigaray maintains that a change in language use can contribute to a change in the social status of women, since “[l]anguage and its values reflect the social order and vice versa” (Irigaray 1996, 66).

Lakoff, Miller/Swift, Kramarae, Spender, and Irigaray each consider not only the possibility of a particularly female language use different from the dominant male one, but they also outline the terms for asking how changes in language use might lead to social and political changes for women. Their concerns remain prominent in feminist discussions of language today, which still include questions such as: Do differences in language use corresponding to gender exist, and if so, how important are they? Might such gender differences in language be a source of empowerment for women or could



they lead to further oppression? How can changing our words lead to changes in the social order, and what linguistic changes ought we to seek? The essays in the first section of this anthology extend such discussions by considering new and important ways in which feminist words can lead to liberation.

Lynne Tirrell, in "Derogatory Terms: Racism, Sexism, and the Inferential Role Theory of Meaning," addresses a difficult yet important question for current feminist language theory: is it possible for a community that has been damaged by derogatory terms to reclaim such terms and use them in a positive, empowering fashion? This issue is of import to feminists, who must consider the possible effects of reclaiming not only terms such as "bitch," "whore," and "dyke," but even "girl," or "feminine," which may have taken on some derogatory force after centuries of patriarchy. It is necessary to ask whether feminists can reclaim such terms as their own without taking on their oppressive connotations. Tirrell considers this issue through an "inferential role theory of meaning" that locates meaning in a network of inferences licensed by a community of speakers. Arguing that it need not be necessary to refuse the use of derogatory terms altogether, Tirrell nevertheless points out that any project of reclamation will not be easy—what must be changed is not simply the connotation or denotation of such terms, but rather a set of discursive commitments supported by larger socioeconomic and legal factors. Tirrell concludes that though this issue is a difficult one to resolve, the discussion of it is helpful in itself because it makes explicit the unjust inferences and commitments these terms carry, and shows thereby the importance of paying attention to words.

Sara Mills, in "Discourse Competence: Or How to Theorize Strong Women Speakers," offers a means for women to use language without specifying a particularly "feminine" way of speaking. Addressing directly the concerns of theorists such as those discussed above, Mills criticizes the division of language use along gendered lines. She argues instead that differences in the way men and women speak is more a function of complex, social factors and power relations than simply a question of gender. Rather than advocating the replacement of a dominant, male language with a female one, Mills offers instead a theory of "discourse competence" that can apply to *any* speaker, providing women with a way to speak strongly without speaking "like men." Mills's view of discourse competence requires

that speakers pay particular attention to the context of their language by exhibiting a concern for their audience and the response that is likely to ensue. It is a competence that recognizes and emphasizes the communicative aspect of language over its purely denotative or truth-naming aspect. Mills therefore brings feminist concerns into a view of language that does not fall prey to a potentially essentialist division along female/male lines.

In "Surviving to Speak New Language: Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich," Jane Hedley compares the changes in language use suggested by the writings of Daly and Rich. Both authors argue that word use is important and influential, and that feminists must therefore choose their words carefully in their efforts to repossess patriarchal language. But, Hedley argues, this repossession takes quite different forms in the work of these two feminists. Mary Daly creates a new lexicon for women that is separated from everyday speech and has the dubious effect of cutting off communication with anyone outside of the elect group who know the language. Rich, on the other hand, suggests an alternative means of speaking that works from within the context of the language already in use. Rather than building new words with radically new, metaphorical meanings as Daly does, Rich suggests revising already-common words to reflect feminist concerns. Rich keeps enough of language's traditional usage to maintain communication among women of varied backgrounds, while changing enough to promote societal transformation. She is therefore, according to Hedley, more successful than Daly at providing a transformative, feminist language that remains practical and open to many.

Georganna Ulary, in "From Revolution to Liberation: Transforming Hysterical Discourse into Analytic Discourse," considers the question of whether women can find a means for liberation within patriarchal language, or whether they can only be stifled by it. Ulary explains how feminists contending with this question have sometimes expressed only two, equally undesirable alternatives: women must either submit to the patriarchal symbolic order, or refuse it and speak hysterically instead. Looking to find a way of using language that does not merely *react* to the dominant discourse (leaving it intact) but rather goes beyond it in a revolutionary fashion, Ulary locates such a possibility in the work of Jacques Lacan. Ulary shows how it may be possible, under Lacan's view, for women to engage in a revolution over the patriarchal symbolic

system from within. Specifically, she argues that merely *refusing* the symbolic through hysterical discourse is not truly *revolutionary* until it is transformed into the discourse of the analysand in psychoanalysis. Citing the work of Julia Kristeva, Urary explains that analytic discourse may provide a way for women to experience liberation in language by allowing for the creation of a subject's own signifiers expressing unique experiences and desires.

## Part II

### *The Power to Speak:*

#### *Who Is Speaking, from Where?*

The authors in this section are concerned with identity, both that of the individual "I" that threatens to become normative, and the group "we" that threatens to obliterate difference among individuals. Elissa Marder, Susan David Bernstein, and Sangeeta Ray work to propose identities that do not do away with difference in favor of an oppressive unity. This is an especially important issue for feminism, which seems constantly in danger of reifying an exclusionary identity of "women." On one hand, there is assumed to be a group named by that term that grounds the existence of the feminist movement. And yet, "women" is a category whose employment too often has the effect of silencing those women who do not fit into its predetermined parameters. Feminism seems caught in the difficult position of having to work on behalf of a diverse group of individuals without eliminating their differences and alternative axes of identification, including race, class, ethnicity, sexual preference, age, etc.

Denise Riley addresses such concerns about identity in *Am I That Name?* (Riley 1988). Riley shows how the identity of "women" is a socially constructed category rather than a "natural" one. She presents a genealogy of the feminist movement in Britain from the late seventeenth century to the nineteenth, showing how "man" became more and more conceived as the objective, neutral individual, while "woman" became more and more associated with sex and gender. This was accompanied by an increasing need to "figure out" the female sex, and a resulting over-characterization of women. Over time, "women" became a distinct category, to which were attached various meanings at different points in history. These

associations developed gradually, through a variety of religious, moral, scientific, economic, political, and other forces. Riley's work thus shows how "women" developed into a category through the various movements of power relations in British history, and is therefore a highly constructed identity rather than a biological or natural one. This means also that it is an identity that cannot be pinned down—feminists cannot say what "women" are, since we have been so many different things at different times.

Feminism, Riley argues, has always been ambiguous, a movement on behalf of an unstable identity called "women." This leaves feminists in a seemingly difficult position. On the one hand, the setting apart of "women" is what has allowed feminism to emerge and to make beneficial societal changes; yet an emphasis on any kind of fixed identity for "women" may tend to reinforce the oppressive power relations that earlier forced the division into separate sexes. Riley shows how "women" as a group is impossible: not only does this category purport to denote a unity of individuals too diverse to ever fit under one heading, but it has been discursively produced so variously that its meaning is vastly overdetermined. Yet it seems to be the task of feminism to work on behalf of all women, and if this is said to be impossible feminism leaves itself open to charges of injustice. Thus, while "women" is impossible, "some women" is inegalitarian, and feminism finds itself caught in the middle.

But this does not mean that feminists' efforts are ineffectual, or that the impossibility of the feminist task should be grounds for its dismissal. The instability of the category "women" is the *sine qua non* of feminism, Riley argues, and the feminist movement is the space of the fighting-out of that identity. For Riley, however, this is not a problem to be lamented. She doesn't advocate giving up on the identity of "women," but suggests instead that we embrace the constructedness and changeability that already characterize feminist identities and concerns. Riley proposes that feminists develop a political movement that accepts its lot of impossibility with a certain reflective and ironic spirit, using the fluidity of women's discursive identity to express multiple possibilities for achieving political goals. Pragmatically, this might mean suggesting that "'women' don't exist—while maintaining a politics 'as if they existed'—since the world behaves as if they unambiguously did" (Riley 1988, 112). Redefining women continuously might help to overthrow what might otherwise

be considered stable conceptions of female identity. Riley thus attempts to steer a middle ground between asserting an identity for women and clamoring for its dissolution.

Judith Butler, expressing similar concerns, shows how the insistence on a closed, unified identity is intimately linked to the use of power. For Butler, feminists must be wary of expressing a single, “female” identity, because doing so merely perpetuates the oppressive effects of power structures in society. In *Gender Trouble* Butler criticizes what she claims to be a general assumption within feminist theory, that there is a coherent identity called “women,” which “not only initiates feminist interests and goals within discourse, but constitutes the subject for whom political representation is pursued” (Butler 1990, 1). One problem with this assumption, she argues, is that positing any particular identity for women is an exclusionary and coercive act that puts pressure on those who refuse it to either change their tune or submit to an “anti-feminist” label. Further, to seek representation for the interests of a category called “women” is to play into the hands of the power that produced such a category in the first place. Butler cites Foucault’s critical analyses of identity and power, arguing that “perhaps a new sort of feminist politics is now desirable to *contest* the very reifications of gender and identity, one that will take the variable construction of identity as both a methodological and normative goal” (Butler 1990, 5, emphasis added). She claims that insisting on unity for the identity of “women” under feminism belies an assumption that a stable unity is necessary for political action—an assumption that need not necessarily be true. Instead, she promotes the idea of coalitions that accept their own internal contradictions, splittings, and fragmentations, and that can take action with these intact. Butler describes these groups as “provisional unities,” identities that “come into being and dissolve depending on the concrete practices that constitute them” (Butler 1990, 16). Coalitions of women could come together to accomplish particular political goals without specifying an overall unity beforehand, and could then dissolve without regret.

Though identity carries with it the oppressive potential of exclusionary power, Butler does not advocate the rejection of identity altogether. She argues instead for the “contemporary task of rethinking subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity *within the terms of power itself*” (Butler 1990, 30, emphasis added). Butler seems to accept the Foucauldian assertion that one can never get

“outside” power (and its attendant identity structures), and she suggests instead that feminist theorists *recirculate* identity in ways that will work to upset it.<sup>14</sup> She suggests parody and performative iteration as good strategies for exhibiting the constructedness of identity in order to “repeat and displace through hyperbole, dissonance, internal confusion, and proliferation the very constructs by which [gender is] mobilized” (Butler 1990, 31). If we can enact in language the constructedness of “women,” this identity could be endlessly modified, resignified rather than being static and coercive.

In her essay “Subaltern Studies,” Gayatri Spivak suggests the strategic use of identity in order to overcome oppression (Spivak 1987). Following Marx, Spivak describes a strategic deployment of a class or group identity for the sake of eliminating the very identity used as a political strategy. For example, workers may unite as workers in order to challenge capitalism and exploitation so that one day they will own the means of their own production and no longer be merely workers but also owners. Discussing the subaltern, Spivak maintains that group identity is necessary to come together in political struggle and change the very identity in question. If we apply Spivak’s notion of “strategic essentialism” to women, we can acknowledge that it might be necessary for women to unite using the group identity that currently serves to keep them oppressed in order to challenge oppression and ultimately to challenge any notion of identity that essentializes *woman*.

The tensions in the debate over women’s identity are becoming more apparent in recent feminist literature. As the variety and specificity of feminist concerns all over the world become more widely recognized within the movement itself, it is inevitable that any clear-cut identity of “women” or “feminists” be shaken by difference within. Theorists such as Riley, Butler, and Spivak try to find ways to balance the benefits and dangers of both emphasizing unity and recognizing its impossibility. The essays in the second section of this collection further such concerns while focusing on language use. They ask what can be done about identity—both the individual “I” and the group “we”—by considering what words can do.

Elissa Marder, in “Disarticulated Voices: Feminism and Philomela,” considers the impossible necessity of “feminist” identity as well as the “we” invoked by those who adhere to it. Marder notes the political benefits of speaking performatively as feminists, of saying “we,” while also recognizing the need to express the



undecidability of such an identity. Because of its political value, Marder argues that the feminist “we” needs to be retained as a provisional, performative tool. But in order to avoid the exclusionary risks that go along with it, feminists must only speak “we” without asserting the existence of a knowable referent for it. In this context, Marder takes up the question of “reading as a feminist,” asking what happens when feminists speak to and through literary texts. Suggesting a feminist reading of Ovid’s Philomela story, Marder locates there a way for feminists to speak together, even through the silence that has been imposed upon them through patriarchy: a feminist “we” founded on a community of pain, a shared relationship to silence and alienation under patriarchy.

In “Confessional Feminisms: Rhetorical Dimensions of First-Person Theorizing,” Susan David Bernstein considers the power of first-person theorizing in feminist theory, focusing on the potential for a confessional mode of writing to disrupt traditional notions of authority, objectivity, and truth in feminist scholarship. Bernstein argues that such confessional acts can be politically transformative, but only if they remain self-critical rather than becoming reified conventions. In other words, the confessional “I” can become a reified, authoritative entity if it is allowed to work as a unified source of truth and knowledge, as a ground for an unproblematized, unmediated “experience.” After considering a taxonomy of confessional modes and illustrating them with examples from recent feminist writings, Bernstein argues that many feminist confessions are *reflective*—they simply mirror an “I” that is not self-critical, whose words are an unquestioned, authoritative account of a clear and coherent experience. As an alternative, Bernstein adds *reflexive* confession to her taxonomy, a mode that investigates its own process of subjectivity through a kind of Foucauldian genealogy.

Sangeeta Ray, in “The Postcolonial Critic: Shifting Subjects, Changing Paradigms,” also considers the political efficacy of including autobiographical elements in feminist writing, with an emphasis on postcolonial criticism. She focuses especially on the designations of race, class, sexual orientation, and geographical location that are often used to indicate an author’s position in the relations of power under discussion in postcolonial texts. Ray points out that while such “micro-narratives” are meant to challenge the impersonal, universal mode of critical discourse, they may also reproduce some of its problematic elements on a smaller scale.

Specifically, though seeking to question metaphysical notions of identity as presence, postcolonial critics may still use such notions to “present” themselves in their autobiographical statements. Ray argues that identity is implicated in a “social encounter” where cultural, political, sexual, and other factors affect the position of the subject vis-à-vis her interactions with others, and that personal narratives should work to express these relationships. Keeping these issues in mind, Ray considers the recent commodification of the voice of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as *the* postcolonial critic, and illustrates the need to avoid such a reification of Spivak’s subject position. In a personal narrative of her own, Ray critically examines her own attempts to negotiate an identity through multiple, heterogenous subject positions and the reactions of those around her.

### *Part III*

#### *The Power of Masculinist Metaphors: Words That Keep Women in Place*

The essays in the last two sections of this volume consider the importance of metaphors, figures, and images in language through a focus on those used by particular philosophers. Natalie Alexander, Andrea Nye, and Roberta Weston each address the power of metaphor within the work of prominent figures in the history of philosophy: Immanuel Kant, Gottlob Frege, and Jacques Derrida, respectively. Their analyses rest on the assumption that metaphor is more than a mere flourish of style, an occasional poetic turn that beautifies, rather than being a necessary part of, the transmission of meaning in language. In this, they share the perspective of many feminist theorists that metaphor is not only a prevalent and indispensable part of language, it is also responsible for helping to shape our conceptions of the world. In other words, metaphor is capable of *doing* things, and doing *feminist* things with metaphor may be a function of criticizing and re-forming metaphors that have oppressive effects for women.

The prevalence of metaphor in language and its role in shaping concepts forms the subject of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s highly influential work on metaphor, *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Lakoff and Johnson argue that our concepts

are largely formed by metaphor, meaning that "... the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 3). Categorizing the various types of metaphors within language, they show how each fits into coherent, conceptual systems through which we categorize and understand our experience. These systems are grounded in groups of basic, central concepts that appear to arise more or less directly from experience, including "UP-DOWN, IN-OUT, FRONT-BACK, LIGHT-DARK, MALE-FEMALE" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 57). While admitting that there is no unmediated physical experience, that culture always intervenes in the way we experience the world, Lakoff and Johnson maintain nevertheless that concepts such as the above are based in experiences that are "more" physical and thus more basic than others. These then become the grounds for many of our metaphors, the bases upon which we build, metaphorically, connections to abstract, less-delineated concepts. How such connections are made is a matter of both physical and cultural experience—e.g., "rational is up, emotional is down" is based in our cultural view of humans as rational animals who are, on account of our rational capacity, in control (above) other animals.

According to Lakoff and Johnson, then, the particular metaphors we use arise in part from experience, both physical and cultural. But more importantly, perhaps, the relationship works the other way as well: metaphor also helps *create* our experience of the world. Lakoff and Johnson explain: "In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept . . . a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 10). For example, in the metaphor "ARGUMENT IS WAR," the focus on the battling aspects of argument can hide other aspects of it, shaping our view of what an argument is or should be according to our understanding of war. This creative capacity of metaphor is especially evident when new metaphors come into usage, according to Lakoff and Johnson, who claim that much cultural change can be attributed to the introduction of new metaphors and the rejection of once-common ones.

What seems conspicuously missing from Lakoff and Johnson's analysis is a *critique* of the kinds of metaphors in use. If metaphor has the power to configure our conceptual picture of the world, it is clear that criticizing and especially changing our metaphors may be an important mechanism for social and political change. Lakoff

and Johnson admit that culture always mediates physical experience, but they do not question or problematize the cultural structures and values that give rise to dichotomous concepts such as UP-DOWN, LIGHT-DARK, MALE-FEMALE, etc., or to their metaphorical connections such as RATIONALITY IS UP, EMOTION IS DOWN. It is clear that their task is almost exclusively descriptive: they seem concerned only to explain how metaphor works, so as to be able to categorize and summarize it.<sup>15</sup> They attempt to remain value-neutral, saying only that the choice of metaphors within a given language will vary with cultural values. The closest they come to criticism is in the assertion that “. . . each culture must define a social reality within which people have roles that make sense to them and in terms of which they can function socially” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 146). Arguably, some cultural values are better at accomplishing this goal than others (and thus some metaphors might be better at creating such a reality than others). Recognizing the power of metaphor to shape reality, Lakoff and Johnson do not criticize the reality we have created with our metaphors thus far.<sup>16</sup>

It is this critical task that is of interest to many feminists working on metaphor. For example, in *The Man of Reason*, Genevieve Lloyd criticizes metaphors and images within Western thought that work to exclude women from ideals of rationality (Lloyd 1984). Lloyd traces conceptions of reason throughout much of the history of Western philosophy, exposing therein a gender bias that is upheld and perpetuated through, among other things, metaphor. Lloyd shows that ideals of rationality have been conceived in part by excluding and transcending elements associated with femininity. Starting from Greek conceptions of reason, Lloyd explains how successive generations of philosophers have perpetuated and built upon such exclusions of the feminine from reason by their use of symbols, images, and metaphors.

According to Lloyd, Greek conceptions of reason centered upon a kind of master-slave relation, as knowledge is said to be gained through a process of controlling and transcending natural forces. The Pythagorean table of opposites exemplifies how clear, determinate reason is associated with maleness, while vague, indeterminate unreason is associated with femaleness. Pythagoras's table is made up of ten opposites, including male/female, light/dark, limit/unlimited, one/many, and straight/curved.<sup>17</sup> The principles in the table associated with clarity, regularity, and limit (and thus reason)

are considered “good” while those associated with vagueness, irregularity, and the unlimited (and thus unreason) are considered “bad.” The feminine thus becomes implicitly associated with that which must be left behind in order to exercise clear reason. This kind of dominance and exclusion resonates throughout the symbols and metaphors of Greek philosophers, according to Lloyd. Greek ideals of rationality were often conveyed through images of dominance, she argues: for example, Lloyd cites Plato’s metaphor of the soul as a pair of winged horses driven by a charioteer to show how, in Greek thought, the unruly passions must be dominated in order to achieve reason. Lloyd argues that though such images are not explicitly associated with a male-female distinction, there is, as with the Pythagorean table, an implicit association of femininity with the matter, nature, or passion that must be dominated for the soul to participate in reason.

This theme, Lloyd argues, is perpetuated and reinforced throughout the history of Western thought, in the work of philosophers from Aristotle to Hegel and beyond. The images and metaphors associating gender with ideals of reason are more or less explicit, depending on the thinker. One of the most explicit is Francis Bacon, whose metaphor of a marriage between mind and nature uses sexual dominance to illustrate and legitimize the dominance of reason over nature. Man must exercise control over nature in the same way he does over his wife—not completely or tyrannically, but with the same degree of force as is right and justified in nuptial relations. Later thinkers built upon such gendered associations, even if they were not explicitly aware of it. For example, Lloyd argues that Descartes’s method of achieving right reason, even though it was meant to apply to women as well as men, perpetuated the earlier genderization of reason. The sharp division between mind and body characterizing the Cartesian method was built upon earlier distinctions associated with gender (mind-male, body-female), making the latter even deeper and more polarized. Lloyd convincingly argues that the metaphors, symbols, and images used by thinkers such as Hume, Kant, Rousseau, and Hegel also adhere to this kind of a gendered structure, regardless of their intentions.

Clearly, for Lloyd, the metaphors connecting gender bias with reason are not merely superficial embellishments. They are not just symptoms of past misogyny that we can do away with by

eliminating the metaphors. Over the course of the history of Western thought, according to Lloyd, our ideals of reason have become “genderized” themselves. Lloyd maintains that our ideals of reason are “male,” with the attendant consequence that femininity has been defined over centuries in terms of what has been excluded from reason. This puts feminists in a difficult position, since simply asserting women’s capacity to conform to the ideals of reason leaves untouched the movement of exclusion inherent in the ideals themselves; and revaluing the “feminine” is little different, since it attempts emancipation within a space already defined by the conceptual model of dominance and exclusion it hopes to change. Leaving this model behind will not be an easy task, but Lloyd hopes that the recent contributions of women to the Western philosophical tradition, especially those of feminist theorists, will help spur Philosophy into self-criticism and a reevaluation of its ideals of reason.

Though Lloyd includes discussions of metaphor in *The Man of Reason*, she does not explicitly focus on it, and consequently does not explain in detail how metaphor affects conceptions of reality.<sup>18</sup> She does assert that metaphor and allegory can affect the way women are seen in terms of their rational capacity, since gendered symbolism exploits and reinforces already-existing views of women. In addition, she insists that gendered metaphors “do not merely express conceptual points about the relations between knowledge and its objects. They give a male content to what it is to be a good knower” (Lloyd 1984, 17). Clearly, metaphor has played an important role in reinforcing and perpetuating the maleness of reason, according to Lloyd. Thus, though she argues that our ideals of reason are too deeply gendered to be thoroughly transformed by simply changing our metaphors, the latter ought certainly to be *part* of such an endeavor.

Exposing gendered metaphors in language and analyzing the extent of their social and political effects is a theme shared by many feminists writing on metaphor. Such concerns have been especially prominent in feminist philosophy of science, where masculine metaphors of reason subduing and controlling nature have been well documented and criticized by theorists such as Sandra Harding (1986), Evelyn Fox Keller (1985), and Carolyn Merchant (1980). The work of theorists such as these, as well as Lakoff and Johnson and Lloyd, has focused attention on metaphor and its capacity to help shape our



understanding of reality.<sup>19</sup> Recent feminist theorists have begun to look more carefully and critically at metaphor as harboring both oppressive and liberatory potential. The essays included in the third section of this anthology extend such concerns by considering both the prevalence and importance of figure and metaphor in language, as well as the effects of specific metaphors used by prominent philosophers in the history of Western thought.

In "Sublime Impersonation: the Rhetoric of Personification in Kant," Natalie Alexander points out that while in his moral theory, Kant insists on the universal dignity and intrinsic worth of all rational beings, he nevertheless sometimes characterizes men and women differently in his writings. Though Kant's views about women are often dismissed as reflections of his time, Alexander considers the issue of Kant's misogyny by exploring a number of rhetorical figures he uses as means of personification. For example, Kant uses "man" to personify human nature, "husband" and "wife" for specifically male and female characteristics, and "Adam and Eve" for the collective development of rationality in humanity. Focusing on the gendered figures in Kant's texts, and noting the characterizations of women that these reflect, Alexander argues that Kant uses such figures of personification in contexts where he wants to emphasize the difference between nature and reason. The gendered connotations of these tropes, according to Alexander, point to a female nature/male reason distinction that puts women in a different relation to the moral law than men, despite Kant's insistence on the universality of his ethical doctrine for all rational agents. Ultimately, Alexander argues, rational agency in Kant's moral theory is reserved for a masculine subject, since there is no place therein for women as subjects.

Andrea Nye, in "Frege's Metaphors," argues that Frege must resort to metaphor in order to explain his logical system of truth-bearing language, even though this system is meant to exclude metaphor. Frege argues that objective truth is best achieved through a logic that excludes imprecise elements such as personal feeling and metaphor, yet Nye shows how he must rely on metaphor in order to communicate his system of logic to others. Nye presents a series of metaphors to which Frege had to resort in order to illustrate the workings of his logic, prompting him to eventually admit an obstacle to logic within language, a kind of "essential inappropriateness" or metaphoricity of language where what is meant

cannot be passed directly from “hand to hand” as would be the logical ideal. Instead, language requires a step forward on the part of one’s audience, a meeting halfway in the murky waters of metaphor. Thus, according to Nye, Frege’s authoritative account of truth relies on and covers over an alternative account that opens truth up to response—making it a function of a reciprocal relationship rather than something transcendent and oppressive. Nye concludes that this alternative account of truth can be of use to feminists who want to avoid notions of truth that set up an absolute authority and cut off responses from others.

In “Free Gift or Forced Figure? Derrida’s Usage of Hymen in ‘The Double Session,’” Roberta Weston criticizes Derrida’s appropriation of “hymen” as a metaphor for undecidability. While Derrida presents the hymen, and its feminine associations, as a “beneficent figure” given freely as a “gift,” Weston argues that its usage is forced, signalling instead a theft or a rape. Derrida forcibly appropriates the female figure through the metaphor of the hymen, according to Weston, and through it places her in a position of silence, lack, and self-sacrifice. Weston argues that Derrida’s use of hymen requires a willful forgetting of the term’s patriarchal history and associations, a forgetting that mirrors the term’s effects on the figure of woman in his texts. Derrida’s work, Weston contends, denies woman property rights to her body and to language, making of the hymen a blank page upon which the phallic instruments of writing are to leave their mark. Weston concludes that by covering over the violence of its appropriation through a catechresis, Derrida’s use of “hymen” as metaphor insidiously perpetuates the very phallogentrism he means to deconstruct.

#### *Part IV*

#### *The Power of Feminist Metaphors: Words That Open Spaces for Women*

The authors in this section discuss the power and pitfalls of feminist metaphors, considering along the way the liberatory potential of replacing masculinist metaphors with ones that empower women. Of central concern is making sure that any new metaphors we might endorse do not reinforce the divisions and power structures upheld by those we mean to replace. Ewa Płonowska Ziarek, Lisa

Walsh, and Cynthia Baker, addressing the work of French feminist theorists Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray, consider the theoretical and practical benefits of the maternal and other feminine metaphors used by these French theorists. Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray all work within a psychoanalytic framework, and their discussion of language and metaphor has been heavily influenced by Jacques Lacan. In order to adequately grasp the main concerns of these French feminists, it is necessary to be familiar with a portion of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, especially as it touches on the role of language.

Lacan emphasized the significance of language in the development of individual identity. Identity, for Lacan, is constructed through difference—the self, the “I,” exists for each individual only across a gap or a rift that signals what is “not-I.” A description of Lacan’s “mirror stage” may help illustrate this point. The mirror stage signals the beginning of individual identity development during childhood. Lacan argues that this occurs when the child learns to form an image of itself as a distinct and unified being by recognizing itself in a mirror (or in the reactions of others, who act as “mirrors”). What is important about the mirror stage is that the child comes to recognize itself in something that is *other* to it, in a reflection outside of itself. This means that the image it comes to call “I” or “myself” contains, and depends upon, what is *not* itself. This otherness is recognized in the difference between what the child experiences as a fragmented, uncontrolled body and the closed unity of the image with which it is faced as the “self.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, the child gains a sense of identity through the mirror stage, but there is at the same time instituted within the psyche a gap that forever drives an unfulfillable desire for wholeness. For Lacan it is significant that the identity thus produced is never fully transparent to itself but is mediated by otherness. In other words, the self is necessarily *social*, shaped by its relationships to other persons, to various social and political factors, and to language.

The effects of language on the subject’s identity are profound, since it is only by entering the “symbolic order” that the subject can become fully delineated as a subject. Entry into the symbolic order coincides, roughly, with the ability to use language and take on social and cultural identities. When the child begins to form its needs into words, or “demands” as Lacan calls them, language is inserted between the child and its mother. The symbolic order breaks

into the mother-child dyad as a “third term,” forcing the separation necessary for the child to develop a fully social identity. Through language the child learns to represent itself symbolically, widening the gap produced through the mirror stage. Language perpetuates and covers over this gap, substituting representations for the proximity and immediacy of the mother-child relationship. This means that in the Lacanian view all language works metaphorically to a certain extent, substituting symbolic elements for direct possession of objects.

An important issue for feminist theory is that for Lacan, the symbolic order is represented by a paternal metaphor—a disciplining father who breaks up the mother-child dyad, enacting the separation necessary for the full development of identity. In this process the child’s relationship to the mother is lost in the gap of separation, setting up a *desire* for fullness that is forever sought after but never recovered. The father governs the development of identity and sociality through language, the symbolic order signified by the *phallus* he possesses and the mother does not. For Lacan, the phallus is the signifier *par excellence*. It signifies the process of signification as a whole, where signs both institute and attempt to fill the gap of absent objects—a movement akin to the above-mentioned *desire* since the gap remains forever unfilled. The phallus is thus never fully present, “it can play its role only when veiled” (Lacan 1977b, 288). It is “the signifier of the desire of the Other,” and it therefore plays a pivotal role in instituting sexual difference (Lacan 1977b, 290). For Lacan, “[sexual] relations will turn around a ‘to be’ and a ‘to have’” (Lacan 1977b, 289): the male *has* the phallus while the female *is* the phallus. In other words, the phallus possessed by the male signifies the desire of the Other, who “finds the signifier of her own desire in the body of him to whom she addresses her demand for love” (Lacan 1977b, 290). For the female, the phallus also signifies the desire of the Other, but being castrated like her mother, she does not *have* it. Instead, she *is* this signifier insofar as she strives to be desirable for the male through masquerade, through illusions meant to cover over her lack. Since the phallus is the signifier of signification, having it allows the male to wield the power of language, while the female, in Lacan’s view, seems able to signify only through masquerade. This view puts women in the troublesome position of being unable to speak without pretending to be men, being capable only of playing at

being the phallus, of imitating the male who has it. This is, on the face of it, clearly problematic from the standpoint of feminist theory, and later feminists theorists have criticized Lacan's view of sexual difference.<sup>21</sup>

The study of metaphor and of language in general has been very important in recent psychoanalytic theory, including the work of Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva. Each of these theorists emphasizes the importance of metaphor, suggesting in different ways a replacement of masculinist metaphors signifying homogeneity and rigidity with feminist ones signifying heterogeneity and fluidity.

Luce Irigaray's texts are filled with figures of multiplicity and fluidity, excess and overflow of boundaries. But it would not be legitimate to label these as metaphors in any traditional sense, since they express for Irigaray a *metonymic contiguity*, a touching of (at least) *two*, rather than a *metaphoric substitution* of *one* for *one*.<sup>22</sup> This is illustrated in the figure of touch as found in "When Our Lips Speak Together," where Irigaray uses *two lips*—those that speak, and those of the female genitalia—to portray a multiplicity within women (Irigaray 1985b).<sup>23</sup> Between the two lips there is a confusion of identity and boundaries: there is a multiplicity, but it is not separable into independent and coherent "ones." Within the figure of touch there are no sharp breaks, no gaps separating that which is touching from that which is being touched. "We are always one and the other, at the same time. . . . Without limits or borders . . ." (Irigaray 1985b, 217). With this figure Irigaray expresses a metonymic contiguity that may open a space within discourse for women to be able to symbolize their bodies, desires, and identities within language, through a symbolic economy different from the metaphoric, paternal one presented by Lacan.

In Lacan's view, entry into the symbolic order requires a substitution of the father for the mother, a sacrifice of the mother that makes of the symbolic an order of substitution, of replacement, of representation. It is an order of sameness that does not allow for *two*—the father *and* mother—but instead lets one fall into a gap for the sake of the unity of the other. Mothers and their daughters are left without access to discourse *as* women; they are either outside of the symbolic (in the realm of nature) or can enter it only as men. Irigaray's figures of contiguity, fluidity, and ambiguity seem designed to help shape a symbolic economy different from the singularity of

the paternal one, an economy that allows for the coexistence, the touching of *two* who are irreducibly different. Irigaray does not put forward this economy to *replace* the other (since this would be another metaphoric substitution), but to allow for another kind of discourse, still symbolic and cultural, in which women can express their multiplicity: "If we don't invent a language, if we don't find our body's language . . . [we will] leave our desires unexpressed, unrealized. Asleep again, unsatisfied, we shall fall back upon the words of men . . ." (Irigaray 1985b, 214). This different discourse is not singular, not static, not representational, but fluid, ambiguous, multiple: "Between our lips . . . several voices, several ways of speaking resound endlessly, back and forth" (Irigaray 1985b, 209). Irigaray's figurative language presents images of a fluid, heterogeneous symbolic economy that may be able to shape new kinds of social, political, and economic relations for the benefit of women.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps through such figures as Irigaray's "two lips" we can envisage a culture and an ethics of difference, of (at least) two rather than one, of male *and* female.

Hélène Cixous also proposes changes in the metaphors of psychoanalytic theory. One of her main targets is Lacan's use of maternal and paternal metaphors in his story of identity development. Cixous counters Lacan's view that women speak only by masquerading as men with the notion of *écriture féminine*, or feminine writing. She argues that the Lacanian, phallic symbolic need not be the only medium through which to use language: it is "theirs," providing a place for "them," but "we" need not therefore remain silent. She urges women to write, to use the symbolic that has kept us silent to create new languages through our own, feminine, writing.

Cixous specifically criticizes the Lacanian assertion that the child must reject its mother in order to enter a "paternal" symbolic order. This story has several consequences, she argues, not the least of which is that language is thereafter characterized by lack, absence, and gaps. It makes of words mere substitutes for the "real" thing, never quite fulfilling enough, always tinged with nostalgia for the plenitude of the mother-child relationship. Cixous argues in "The Laugh of the Medusa" that it need not be necessary to suppress the mother in order to speak, to make of her a gaping hole for the sake of language (Cixous 1976). She suggests that it is really only men who do this anyway, that the story has been wrongly extended to include the childhood of women as well. She claims that women do



not build up as many defenses against drives as men do, do not forego pleasure as they do; and in this sense, “[e]ven if phallic mystification has generally contaminated good relationships, a woman is never far from ‘mother’ . . .” (Cixous 1976, 881). Women have a privileged relationship to the mother, whose voice speaks closeness and plenitude within them: “In women there is always more or less of the mother who makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation” (Cixous 1976, 882). Cixous makes of this “mother” a metaphor for a closeness, a touching within women that counters lack.<sup>25</sup> She argues that we can counter “their” symbolic with our own, a symbolic that does not pine for the mother who is absent, but that speaks her voice from within. Cixous’s feminine writing (*écriture féminine*) takes place within this new, female symbolic order.

Julia Kristeva also theorizes a space beyond language and connects it with the mother, but she does not claim any privileged link to it for women, nor does she argue for a particularly feminine language. Kristeva’s work points to a destabilization of all identities, including the female. Still, she does adhere to the psychoanalytic framework that, metaphorically, makes of language a “paternal” order and labels the pre-linguistic stages “maternal.” Like Cixous, Kristeva uses a maternal metaphor to criticize Lacan’s insistence on the loss of the mother upon entering the symbolic order. She argues that the mother is never completely lost (for both men and women), that the relationship with her returns continually and plays a necessary role in the symbolic order. Kristeva calls the maternal element within symbolic language the “semiotic,” referring to the rhythms and tones of language, its melodies and movements. But unlike Cixous, she does not use the return of the mother to ground a new kind of language for women. Rather, the maternal metaphor helps her to reassess the structure of the symbolic order generally and to theorize an otherness already present within it. For Kristeva, symbolic language transforms itself through its poetic, metaphoric, semiotic elements—which are indeed described in terms of a maternal metaphor, but which do not thereby constitute a specifically feminine language.

For Kristeva the semiotic order is rooted in the space of the mother-child relationship, a maternal space she describes in *Revolution in Poetic Language* as the *chora* (Kristeva 1984a).<sup>26</sup> The *chora* is ordered by the mother’s authority over the child’s drives,

including her prohibitions and frustrations of the child's bodily needs. It is a rhythmic space regulated by divisions necessary to, yet different from, the later separations that occur through entry into the symbolic order and development of a clear personal identity. The semiotic order emerging from the *chora* is ordered by ambiguity, as it "effectuates discontinuities by temporarily articulating them and then starting over, again and again" (Kristeva 1984a, 26). The semiotic is not replaced by the symbolic after the mirror stage and the resolution of the Oedipus complex, but remains a necessary part of language. It is the material element of language, the rhythms, tones, and musicality of it. Moreover, for Kristeva it is the semiotic element of signification that makes metaphorical language transformative, even revolutionary, due to the influx of heterogeneity it brings into the symbolic order.<sup>27</sup>

Irigaray, Cixous, and Kristeva are each concerned in different ways with the power of figure and metaphor. Each agrees that language plays an important role in the life of the subject, since it is necessary for both the individual's identity and its social relations. For each of these three authors, metaphor can have powerful effects on both the subject and society. But whether or not such abstract changes in metaphor alone can change the world is a complex and controversial question. Even those feminists who subscribe to the view that language can have a creative role in shaping reality face a paradox: it seems political reality requires that women be empowered in language before they have a place from which to speak a new language, with new metaphors. There must be a dialectical movement between language use and women's social status—changes in language use produce changes in social positions which in turn produce changes in language use, and so on. In terms of women's oppression, sexual difference will not be liberating until it is no longer grounds for discrimination.

The authors in the last section of this collection provide important contributions to the debate over how to replace metaphors detrimental to a feminist agenda with ones that might help to empower women. They consider the ways in which we can use feminist metaphors to empower women while maintaining, even sustaining, differences between them.

Ewa Płonowska Ziarek, in "At the Limits of Discourse: Heterogeneity, Alterity, and the Maternal Body in Kristeva's Thought," considers Kristeva's controversial use of maternal metaphors in

connection with the semiotic order and the chora. Kristeva has been criticized for locating the revolutionary potential of the semiotic in a prediscursive realm, which harbors the possibility of an essentialist biologism. Ziarek counters such criticisms by arguing that Kristeva's work presents an *infolding* of difference in language and culture that problematizes the very distinction between discursive and prediscursive realms. Ziarek shows how for Kristeva, the semiotic appears within the symbolic and is, in an important sense, *both* presymbolic and postsymbolic. The *chora* and the semiotic order are therefore not natural or biologicistic, but cultural, symbolic strategies for discussing the heterogeneity that is a necessary, though often repressed, element of the symbolic order. The metaphor of the maternal body in Kristeva's work, according to Ziarek, is also characterized by an infolding of difference, an otherness within the same. Ziarek concludes by showing the value of Kristeva's work for feminists, including her notion of a subjectivity-in-process that could help shape an open, pliable feminist identity.

Lisa Walsh, in "Writing (into) the Symbolic: The Maternal Metaphor in H el ene Cixous," discusses in detail Cixous's use of a maternal metaphor. Criticizing the Lacanian view that the mother must be excluded, replaced by the father in order for the child to enter the symbolic order, Cixous brings her back into the Oedipal picture in a "metaphorical fourth to the Oedipal triad." According to Walsh, Cixous reestablishes a connection to the mother that disrupts the supremacy of the paternal position in the symbolic order, and makes possible the expression of a feminine imaginary within language through * criture f eminine*. This feminine writing privileges the rhythmic, lyrical elements of language associated with vocal expression, and provides evidence that the symbolic order need not be univocal, paternal only—the mother need not be silenced for the sake of language, but can instead provide a means for "us" to write in "our" symbolic. Walsh argues that Cixous's "maternal metaphor" is not really a metaphor at all, since it does not work according to the logic of substitution that governs metaphor—Cixous does not substitute a maternal symbolic for the paternal one. Instead, the maternal metaphor allows for what Walsh calls a renewed access to the symbolic in a "past future," a reconnection to the past maternal body which also provides for feminine writing within a symbolic future.

Cynthia Baker, in "Language and the Space of the Feminine: Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray," considers the differing ways in

which Kristeva and Irigaray use “the feminine” as metaphor in their work. Baker is particularly concerned with showing that the two theorists need not be read against each other, as if to agree with one of them must require disagreeing with the other. She argues that this has often been the trend in the reception of French feminism on American shores, and that it reflects a movement of hierarchy and exclusion that Irigaray and Kristeva (as well as many American feminists) are trying to get beyond. Baker shows how the work of Irigaray and Kristeva can be read in a complementary fashion by emphasizing the similarities within the two theorists’ views. They share, for example, the claim that the phallic symbolic exists only through the exclusion of women, and they use various images and metaphors of the feminine in order to bring it back into language and culture. Further, Baker argues, the methods of the two theorists complement each other: Irigaray’s efforts to criticize contemporary aspects of Western culture as they reveal women’s oppression are complemented, Baker suggests, by Kristeva’s concerns to trace historical trends beyond their current manifestations in one culture at one time. Baker concludes that the work of Irigaray and Kristeva can be used together as an important contribution to feminist discourse.

Overall, the essays in this collection advance discussions of the relationship between language, oppression, and liberation. By addressing critical issues such as how changes in language use can have larger social and political effects, and how metaphor in particular may be especially effective in this regard, these authors present groundbreaking work in areas that are of significant concern for current feminist theories of language. Moving beyond past discussions into new regions of inquiry, the essays included here provide a valuable contribution to the important and often controversial discourse concerning the words of feminists, and what we can do with them.

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#### NOTES

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1. This title is a play on J. L. Austin’s *How to Do Things With Words* (Austin 1962). There Austin breaks down his earlier distinction between “constatives” and “performatives” because various types of constatives also seem to be performatives. He develops a classificatory system for

“illocutionary forces” of which both constatives and performatives are subsets. One of the implications of Austin’s analysis of language is that language use is not only action because we perform it but also because through language use we perform many other types of actions.

2. Elissa Marder, “Disarticulated Voices: Feminism and Philomela,” chapter 5 of this volume.

3. There are, of course, feminists who reject this distinction, criticizing attempts to divide language along gendered lines. See, for example, Sara Mills’s essay (Chapter 1 of this volume) for a detailed criticism of some of the views presented below.

4. Throughout this Introduction, terms such as “speech,” “writing,” and “language” (e.g., “female language” vs. “male language”) will be used to designate various means of language use and will be used interchangeably rather than referring to differences between spoken and written language.

5. See also (Kramarae 1984) and (Kramarae 1983).

6. The work of Lakoff, Miller/Swift, and Kramarae can be criticized on several fronts. Linguists have criticized their research for methodological reasons, including the fact that they rely on small, unrepresentative samples as well as anecdotes and personal experience rather than engaging in comprehensive studies. In addition, counter-studies refute the findings cited above: e.g., a study by Dubois and Crouch concludes that men use more “tag” questions than women (Dubois and Crouch 1975). Also, the claim that there is a difference in language use that corresponds to gender difference is controversial. First of all, these theorists presuppose that which they are trying to find: they survey a particular group in order to demonstrate some characteristics that define the group, yet they have already defined the group in order to carry out their surveys. Secondly, male language use is taken as a norm against which feminine deviations are measured. As Deborah Cameron points out, these linguists are left to explain the female difference from the “norm” but not the male adherence to it (Cameron 1985, 45; see also Cameron 1992). Finally, there is a tension between the way these theorists view language when setting out the gender differences in its use (where they assume that language *reflects* social reality) as opposed to when they are making suggestions for change (when they seem to argue that language can *create* a new social reality). If women speak a certain way because of a social position that is powerless, how can they hope to gain power by changing the way they speak?

7. See (Whorf, 1976).

8. Important to Spender’s view is the distinction between dominant and muted groups in societies. Here she is greatly influenced by the research of Edwin and Shirley Ardener (See Edwin Ardener 1971, Shirley

Ardener 1978, and Dube, et. al 1986). Like the Ardeners, Spender argues that in a society there will be dominant groups and muted groups, the former maintaining their power by silencing the latter. In our society men are one of the dominant groups, women one of those who are muted.

9. There are still important problems with her theory, many of which have been articulated by Maria Black and Rosalind Coward in their review of *Man Made Language* (Black and Coward 1990). Black and Coward argue that although Spender makes claims for the creative capacity of language, she still falls back on the view that language reproduces or expresses experience. Spender argues at times that male language reflects male experience, and female language, if it were to be voiced, would express the experience of women. Yet she also maintains that language shapes experience. This leads to some confusion as to what women can do to undermine man-made language. In some places Spender argues that women need to take control of their language and create a place for their alternative meanings (Spender 1980, 93, 101, 134, 162). Yet elsewhere she suggests that women's social status will not change as a result of a change in language (Spender 1980, 79); and further, women's meanings cannot even be articulated until women's status changes (77). It seems that Spender leaves us with a catch-22: we must change language *in order* to liberate women, yet we cannot change language *until* we liberate women.

10. Irigaray both refers to Hegel's notion of recognition and revises it. For Hegel, recognition of an "other" is what allows self-consciousness to emerge, i.e., consciousness of self is dependent upon consciousness of others *as* others, not as extensions of the self. This much Irigaray keeps. But for Hegel, the dual relation of self-consciousnesses involved is hierarchical at first, a "master-slave" relation that is eventually reversed through the recognition of each in the other. Irigaray argues for a kind of recognition that avoids hierarchy altogether, an understanding that the other is so irreducibly different that the self could never "master" it. As discussed below, she finds this kind of relationship in a view of the other as gendered, i.e., in recognition of sexual difference. See the section on "Lordship and Bondage" in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel 1977, 111–119). See also (Irigaray 1996, 103–108).

11. Irigaray's emphasis on sexual difference has invited charges of essentialism. Critics have argued that she fails to adequately theorize the social construction of gender. See, e.g., (Moi 1985). Moi argues that Irigaray makes of the female gender a stable, unchanging and ahistorical identity, due to her characterization of patriarchal oppression as a monolithic power structure. Irigaray claims that her work leads to the opposite conclusion. For example, she claims that in her view "there is no more 'natural immediacy'. . . to be born a girl in a male-dominated culture is not necessarily



to be born with a sensibility appropriate to my gender. No doubt female physiology is present but not identity, which remains to be constructed" (Irigaray 1996, 107). Irigaray argues that female identity is not stable or ahistorical, because it has never really existed as an equal to the male. It remains for us to make it. The debate over Irigaray's alleged essentialism is a very complex one, and continues in current feminist literature.

12. For an elaboration of Irigaray's views of language and women's position relative to it, see Cynthia Baker's essay in the last section of this volume.

13. Foucault argues that political resistance to power should take the form of resisting identity rather than reifying it. This is because for him, the notion of a closed identity is a function of power, and part of resisting power is resisting such an identity as well as the notion of transcendent truth that upholds it. For an elaboration of the relationship between power, truth and political resistance, see especially (Foucault 1980), (Foucault 1983), and (Foucault 1990, 92–96).

14. See (Foucault 1980, 141) for Foucault's assertion that power cannot be "gotten rid of."

15. There is one place where Lakoff and Johnson seem to move in a prescriptive direction: in their discussion of new metaphors, they do suggest a couple of new metaphors that might help us look at reality in what appears to be a *better* way (e.g., "LOVE IS A COLLABORATIVE WORK OF ART"). But they stop short of providing a strong interpretation of the value of such metaphors, saying only that they appear forceful to persons of a particular generation and culture, rather than that they are valuable metaphors in general (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 139–146).

16. One might argue that such a discussion could have been left out by Lakoff and Johnson partly out of a concern for cultural pluralism, a fear of imposing one's own cultural values on the rest of the world by engaging in a kind of universal criticism of the kinds of metaphors in use. Criticizing "objective" notions of truth, they argue that truth is relative to conceptual systems, which means that it changes from culture to culture (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 193). Still, recognizing this need not lead one into a crippling relativism that would disallow any criticism of metaphors and cultural values (within one's own culture, at least). In addition, there may be certain values that are arguably universal in an ethical sense, e.g., basic human rights; racial, ethnic, and gender equality and justice, etc., that could form the basis for critique.

17. These correspond in part with the pairs of opposites presented by Lakoff and Johnson, above. Clearly, Lloyd's work is aimed at criticizing objective assumptions about basic conceptual categories such as those they

present—i.e., up/down, front/back, light/dark, etc. may not be simple, innocent categories arising “more or less directly from experience,” as Lakoff and Johnson argue. Instead, following Lloyd, we can easily see how they may harbor a gender bias that works to the detriment of women (especially when one of the pairs is male/female!).

18. Phyllis Rooney takes up this task in “Gendered Reason: Sex Metaphor and Conceptions of Reason” (Rooney 1991). Focusing exclusively on metaphor, Rooney extends Lloyd’s discussion of gendered reason by adding a more detailed explanation of the workings of metaphor and its consequent effects on conceptions of reality and women’s place therein.

19. See also Eva Feder Kittay, “Woman as Metaphor” (Kittay 1988). Drawing in part on her work on metaphor (see Kittay 1987), Kittay discusses the motivations for and effects of men’s use of woman as metaphor for their relations to and projects within the world.

20. See (Lacan 1977a).

21. The above criticism is taken primarily from Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (Grosz 1990, 70–72, 121–134). See also (Gallop 1982), (Mitchell 1985) and (Rose 1985). In her essay included here, Georganna Urary argues that Lacan’s symbolic need not be a “prison-house of language” for women. Urary explains that Lacan’s view still leaves open a way for women to use language against the paternal symbolic from a position within it.

22. Irigaray mentions an “economy of metaphor” in “Plato’s Hystera” see (Irigaray 1985a, 346), relating it to a “genealogy of sameness” that makes the male and female substitutable, the same, not in (contiguous) contact as different. See (Whitford 1991, 177–185) for an in-depth discussion of Irigaray’s views on metaphor and metonymy (to which much of what follows is indebted).

23. See also (Irigaray 1985c).

24. How the figures of fluidity and touch can affect social and political circumstances for women is a complex question. Margaret Whitford suggests that Irigaray’s figures are fictions or myths that may anticipate and therefore shape new kinds of social relations (Whitford 1991, 185–191). Elizabeth Grosz argues that Irigaray’s images provide “new emblem[s] by which female sexuality can be positively *represented*,” new models that can “construct women’s experience of their corporeality and pleasures” outside of the models provided by the male-dominated culture (Grosz 1989, 116). Grosz points out that for Irigaray cultural change requires, among other things, changes in language and representational norms; so that changes in social circumstances for women may not come about without new ways

of symbolizing female sexuality (Grosz 1989, 109–110). This is not to say, however, that Irigaray's figures are meant to provide *the* models for female sexuality—Grosz argues that Irigaray uses these figures to expose the processes by which dominant discourses are produced, rather than to provide a feminine language for women to adopt (Grosz 1989, 127). New discourses, feminine languages, are possibilities that must be left open.

25. Lisa Walsh argues in chapter 12 of this volume that Cixous's "maternal metaphor" is not really a metaphor at all, since it does not work according to a movement of substitution.

26. See also (Kristeva 1982, 71–72) for further discussion of how the semiotic is ordered through maternal regulation of the child's bodily drives.

27. Kristeva's work has been criticized by feminists for several reasons. First, some feminists argue that by carrying over maternal and paternal metaphors from the psychoanalytic story of identity development, Kristeva may drag along much of the problematic baggage that goes along with them (see Grosz 1989, 65). Also, Kristeva's discussion of the semiotic *chora* as connected to the mother has led to charges of essentialism (see Ewa Płonowska Ziarek's essay, chapter 11 below for a discussion of these charges and some effective rebuttals). Another problem many feminists have with Kristeva's work is that she uses maternal metaphors such as the *chora* to upset all notions of identity, including female identity (see Grosz 1989, 66–68) for criticism of Kristeva's view on the grounds that it doesn't deal with the particular ways in which women are oppressed). The most obvious objection feminists can have to Kristeva's work, of course, is that she has at times rejected feminism outright. See especially (Kristeva 1984b, 273–275), where Kristeva discusses feminism in terms of "political perversion." Yet it may still be the case that Kristeva would support a feminism that respects radical, individual difference rather than covering it over. Overall, her warnings against adhering too closely to an identity that is coercive are important in terms of feminist theory, in order that we avoid turning our efforts into "the killer mechanism of individual difference" (Kristeva 1984b, 273).

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