

The SAGE Handbook of
Feminist Theory

Edited by
Mary Evans, Clare Hemmings
Marsha Henry, Hazel Johnstone
Sumi Madhok, Ania Plomien
and Sadie Wearing



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Introduction

Mary Evans

This *Handbook* attests to the richness, across continents and academic disciplines, of feminist theory in the second decade of the twenty-first century. The five individual sections of this Handbook have been edited by Clare Hemmings, Marsha Henry, Sumi Madhok, Ania Plomien and Sadie Wearing, all colleagues, together with Hazel Johnstone, the editorial manager of the collection, at the Gender Institute of the London School of Economics. The various sections contain essays on diverse subjects from writers across the globe. These essays are brought together by the conviction that feminist theory offers important and radical possibilities for the understanding of many of the major intellectual and social issues of the twenty-first century. Thus a central characteristic of this Handbook is that the authors whose work is presented here all recognize that the concerns of feminist theory reach across subjects, issues and locations. Feminist theory does not exist within narrow perimeters of concern and engagement; the impact of feminist theory has become evident both within and outside the academy. The concerns of feminist theory and its subject matter of gender relations are now an explicit, and pivotal, aspect of the world of the twenty-first century.

But that statement should not be taken to imply that the authors whose work makes up the *Handbook* see the present state of feminist theory in terms of those problematic terms of 'growth' and 'development'. Both these words carry with them implicit assumptions of movement away from some form of infant state towards a desired situation of maturity and adulthood. It would be foolish to deny that there are more people engaged with feminist theory, both within and outside the academy, in the twenty-first century than in the twentieth, but from this we should not assume that feminist theory fits neatly into a chronological intellectual history or that forms of technological and institutional change have rendered certain questions redundant. Hence it is important to establish here that the history of feminist theory is not that of a linear progress from absence to presence and that if we cling to a chronological model of feminist theory we are in danger of situating it within an account of social change that accords too easily with concepts of the 'modern' and 'progress'. In linking the history of feminist theory with these terms, feminist theory is too easily assumed to be a part of those political and ideological aspects of the twenty-first century that in many ways refuse some of the more difficult questions about gender and its social forms. If we argue, for example, that feminist theory is an aspect of the 'emancipation' of women in the global north we marginalize or exclude those aspects of women's agency that exist elsewhere today or have existed in the past. Feminist theory, that general concern with the order of gender relations, invites us to re-think not just the present but also the past; it is at its best when it is not collusive with a particular model of social development or social relations.¹

Thus readers of this *Handbook* should not expect to find within these pages accounts of feminist theory that invoke an intellectual progress narrative from a point in the historical past to a point in the historical present. All academic work builds on existing paradigms but this should not be taken to assume that the issues and the questions that form the core of any subject

matter necessarily change or disappear because the theoretical interventions on those subjects become more sophisticated or part of both academic and more general discussion. Questions of the gender of power, for example, remain as central today as they did in any previous century and the fact of an accumulated literature on this, or any other subject, does not in itself demonstrate the disappearance of a relation of subjection or inequality. A significant body of feminist theory (as the section edited by Ania Plomien makes clear) is engaged with questions of material reality and this case demonstrates to us that we should not confuse changes in the everyday circumstances of our lives with changes in the underlying structure of human relationships. 'Change', in the sense of both material and technological development as well as the re-ordering of social relations consequent upon changing cultures and politics, does not inevitably bring with it changes in the social relations of power, privilege and authority.

Despite this proviso the *Handbook* is also a testament to the liberating intellectual challenges and possibilities of feminist theory, as important now as at any point in the past. Those possibilities take three major forms: of engagement with the various forms of politics of the worlds in which we live, the fusion of academic disciplines and the many possibilities of cross-disciplinary research and – a way in which feminist theory is often particularly liberating – the sense of personal involvement and recognition that working within, and with, feminist theory allows.² All these possibilities cross time and continents: they allow people from diverse personal and social circumstances to work together and feminist theory has, again for longer than is often recognized, created a sense of theoretical community between those with similar commitments and interests. The well-attended conferences organized around feminist theory in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are part of a tradition of the making of feminist theory that has its roots in the various meetings of women, across national and racial boundaries, that have met and discussed questions both of specific interest to women and to men and women on subjects such as slavery and disarmament.³ As in all cases where individuals have come together to discuss a particular subject there are implicit, as well as explicit, theories that underlie the meetings: 'theory' is not just a subject for academic debate but also takes the form of that complex mix of the empirically known and the taken-for-granted assumption that makes up the way in which individuals interpret the world.

But over and above these important considerations is the role of feminist theory as a challenge to much of what has existed as knowledge which is supported by the implicit and unspoken authority of men, a form of authority that has existed across time and place. In all societies there is what is described as either a normative order or dominant knowledge, ontologies which carry with them the expectation of social obedience and compliance. Dissent from these assumptions can carry penalties from mortal danger to various forms of more, or less, significant exclusion. Yet what complicates this account, as far as this volume is concerned, is that there is no straightforward alliance between gender and authoritative knowledge: men have dissented against the views of other men, women have maintained, upheld and sanctioned dominant views.⁴ So, again, we cannot write a history of feminism that overlooks the ways in which 'gendered knowledge' has not always taken the form of knowledge that is written by men and for male interests and excludes women and the recognition of the feminine. At the same time, and certainly in the context of western traditions of intellectual life, it is essential to recognize the longstanding identification of the human with the biologically male (and usually white and privileged) human, not least because what has been derived from this are feminist traditions that have been formed through the assertion of the radical relevance of gender difference.

We need, therefore, to both assign 'feminist theory' to a long and complex life and to consider the way in which what we now recognize as 'theory' is part of a tradition and carries with it many of the complexities and the contradictions of the past. In this *Handbook* many of the essays are written by individuals who are employed within the academy, a place of

work that has presented (certainly in the countries of the global north) various obstacles and refusals to the presence of women, as either those studied or those studying. Many of these aspects of the rejection of various forms of the feminine have now disappeared but what has been left are a number of ways in which what is identified (by others and by itself) as 'feminist' theory attracts critiques of, crucially, marginality and partiality. Despite the theoretical pluralism that is a consequence and characteristic of post-modernism there remains a sense in which, however much 'grand narratives' are supposed to have become redundant, the conventional narratives of the western meta-theoretical still have a central symbolic as well as a practical importance and authority.

This issue, of the authority and the meaning of theory, is one that raises two questions which transcend all aspects of feminist theory: the meaning and the status of the term 'theory' and the disciplinary origins of feminist theory. To take the second question first, we should note that from the time of the western Enlightenment the discipline outside the natural sciences which has had the greatest status within universities and public intellectual life has been that of philosophy (a discipline that, we should also note, has aspects of its intellectual heritage in theology, and hence with questions of absolute knowledge). The disciplinary authority of philosophy is important because two of the most influential writers on questions of gender in the twentieth century, Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler, have been students and subsequently teachers of that discipline. This is not to say that very powerful interventions by feminists have not been made from and within other disciplines and other forms of social engagement (for example, in fiction and in political organizing) but within the academy both Beauvoir and Butler have inspired work outside the confines of philosophy. This has had interesting and important consequences for the ways in which feminist 'theory' is conceived and these various manifestations of the 'theoretical' are all evident here. This takes us to the first question raised above, that of the definition of 'theory' itself, with the accompanying issues of the tensions between what is defined as theory and what is defined as the 'empirical' or the 'material' and the ways in which it is possible (if at all) to define the distinctive features of feminist theory.

To take the first of these questions: the definition, and the implications of that definition, of the term 'theory', a word so confidently part of the title of this volume. Dictionary definitions aside, the word usually carries with it the expectation that what a theory can do is to explain, to account for, an aspect of the social or the physical world. 'Theories' about the relationship of the earth to the sun, the form of matter and energy or, in another context, the making and the components of the human psyche all figure large in most accounts of the history of the global north. To live in a world without theory is often taken to imply that people live in worlds in which the very possibility of explanation has not been encountered, let alone pursued in that classic form of scientific experiment: thesis, exploration and demonstration, and then conclusion. But this very method, generally referred to as 'scientific', has raised considerable concerns and controversies. The question of 'how do we know' is recognized as important and yet certain disciplines (and philosophy is a particularly good example here) *know* in ways and with different forms of certainty that is sometimes not the case within other disciplines. When Beauvoir wrote that 'One is not born, but rather becomes, woman' she made an assertion, a form of comment about the world, that could be regarded with scepticism. Beauvoir went on to support her argument with material from both the 'real' and the imagined worlds. In both cases the evidence that she produced is immediately questionable: individual works of literature are produced by authors from specific circumstances and with little allowance that other authors might suggest very different ideas, and her references to the 'real' world were drawn from her own experiences of a limited social context and without any qualifying recognition of those limitations. In all, what might be said of Beauvoir's much repeated remark is that it is an assertion supported by some very partial and limited evidence. Nevertheless, the central argument of *The Second Sex*

(that, in western cultures, women constitute ‘the other’) has come to be accepted as ‘theory’ and as a starting point for subsequent theoretical explorations. As Sonia Kruks writes in an *Introduction* to an essay by Beauvoir entitled *Right Wing Thought Today*:

she (Beauvoir) is highly attuned ... to the Eurocentric and masculinist tones of Western elite thought, describing it as a thought that ‘monopolizes the supreme category – the human’ for itself. (Kruks, 2012: 10)⁵

That comment by Beauvoir – that Western elite thought conflates the human with the masculine – is crucial to both the history and the present of feminist theory. Moreover, unlike the assertion about how women ‘become’ there is, as a glance at any literature of any subject of the past 200 years would suggest, no shortage of corroborative evidence. In the history of feminist theory it has been the starting place for feminist interventions: the starting point that asks the question about the authority of judgements made without the recognition of gender difference. Just as important is the identification of the male with the human today: in the work of Judith Butler we can perceive the way in which the ‘trouble with gender’ became the starting point for Butler’s determination to refuse the resolution of the question by Beauvoir (identification with the male) by constructing an account of gender that disallowed the presence of gender as anything other than a learned (and repeated) performative practice. Indeed, Butler’s account of gender renders it as a fiction in which achieved gender status is a fiction rather than an absolute state supported by fiction, which is the case in the work of Beauvoir.

It is thus that Judith Butler, again a philosopher by education and professional affiliation and again a writer whose work moves (as many of her critics have pointed out) rapidly from theoretical assertion to engagements with the ‘real’ world that various writers have found problematic, suggests a way through the various confines that binary accounts of gender implicitly offer. The punctuation that explicitly challenges straightforward assumptions of the way in which we read ‘the real’ is to indicate an essential part of Butler’s argument: that the real world is no more or less than our capacity to re-affirm or to destabilize it. The many arguments around Butler’s work (arguments which engage with the trajectory of her work from *Gender Trouble* to more recent work on state violence) have been the subject of various volumes but here what is important is to note, as this volume will demonstrate, the range of Butler’s influence. At the same time, both Butler and Beauvoir raise questions for feminist theory that are less about the explanatory authority and vitality of their work and more about the issues presented to feminist theory by writers whose very discipline poses problems about the relationship of theory to practice. Those problems are explicit in the work of both writers: the Simone de Beauvoir who wrote *The Second Sex* would not, at the time of the book’s publication in 1949, have regarded herself as a feminist, in the same way Butler resists the term ‘feminist’ when associated only with women because of the essentialist connotations of the term. This would seem to present feminist theory, in the case of both Beauvoir and Judith Butler, with a theoretical tradition in which two of its most influential writers have complex relationships with that tradition.

At this point it is worth turning to two other great theoretical traditions of the western post-Enlightenment world: Marxism and psychoanalysis. Each tradition is associated with those often abused figures of ‘founding fathers’, and both have long traditions of considerable social engagement and diverse contributors. But what is interesting about these traditions – psychoanalysis scorned by Beauvoir, Marxism largely irrelevant to Butler – is that they are formed around and through intense engagement with the study of the real, material world, be it the means of production in the case of Marx or individual human beings in the case of Freud. Both men too, in common with Butler and Beauvoir, never assumed the human condition to be ‘natural’; the contingent is too powerful a part of social existence for there ever to be a fixed or final state of being human.

Yet what is distinct in the work of Marx and Freud is that in the making of the human both detected patterns in which the individual and the social combined to form connections that were predictable and beyond individual control. The child and the resolution of the Oedipal drama and the person born with only labour to provide for herself or himself constitute the (almost) general condition of human beings; circumstances in which agency may well come to exist but is not absolute or inevitable. Marx, despite the origins of his work in Hegelian idealism (and that particular presence in what has become known as the 'young' Marx), subsequently came to locate the dialectical implications of his account of political economy within precise historical conditions. What remained constant in his work (and in that of Freud) was the recognition of that dialectic between human beings and their circumstances, in which both parties change and are changed through their relationship.

This is arguably not the case for Beauvoir nor, indeed, for Butler. In *The Second Sex* biologically female people may well 'become' women but that becoming is a process in which the female is the made person, never the subject who makes. Indeed, for Beauvoir, it would seem that the only way in which women can acquire agency is through the reproduction of the male, in terms of both social presence and abstract understanding. This binary is not, however, one of a dialectical relationship: there is no mutual change, only a making of 'woman' in terms from which the only escape is that of the masculine. From this, it is possible to surmise that what is arguably the case about Beauvoir's resolution of the apparent theoretical powerlessness of women, a lack of power which arises from the ways in which literal women are seen as passive occupiers of their given social (and epistemological) space, might also be said about feminist theory: that in its identity with the feminine and the female arise questions about the extent to which the epistemological status of feminist theory is that of amendment or addition to theory *per se*. This issue underlies many of the questions raised in the section in the *Handbook* edited by Sumi Madhok and myself on *Epistemology and Marginality*, in which the link between knowledge and marginal status and identity is explored.

In the history of western feminism there are numerous examples of campaigns by women (both with and without the support of men) for access to those institutions from which we have been excluded. At the same time there have also been notable interventions by women about re-thinking the very nature of public life, be it intellectual, institutional or political. All these interventions have been generated by the assumption that the various privileges of the world, not the least of which is power over both the self and others, have been more generally owned and assumed by men. This has placed individuals who wish to challenge and change the gendered distribution of power in the situation of both needing to demonstrate forms of inequality and at the same time account for the differential. The 'natural' as a form of social explanation has largely lost some of its legitimacy in the west, even if neo-liberalism has achieved (and particularly since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991) the feat of establishing the authority of the assumption that the market economy is the 'natural' form of political economy. Yet if relations between human beings other than the economic are in no sense 'natural', feminism has to account for various social differences both between women and men as well as for the meaning of those categories of the masculine and masculinity and the feminine and femininity. It is 'theory', in the most general rather than feminist sense, that has allowed us to consider the ways in which biologically male and female people are 'made'.

But of the theories that most forcefully question the ways in which the human condition is made and reproduced it is Marxism and psychoanalysis that have best retained their relevance through decades of shifts in intellectual paradigms. Marx and Freud were products of nineteenth-century western modernity, their work hugely informed by, and located within, the history of the west and its longstanding cultural traditions. Freud is nothing without Ancient Greek mythology, Marx depends upon an account of history stretching back to the

most technologically simple societies for his vision of the ways in which political economies evolve. Both men have been widely criticized by feminists: Freud for his views on psychosexual development, Marx for what is read as his refusal to consider gender inequality in his account of social inequality.⁶ Yet from the same context – that of feminist theory – there have come important defences and use of the work of both Marx and Freud; many feminist accounts of works of the imagination, as the section edited by Sadie Wearing on *Literary, Visual and Cultural Representation* makes apparent, owe a considerable debt to Freud. That Freudian presence is equally evident in the section on *Sexuality* edited by Clare Hemmings; it is not, in either case, that the various authors are ‘reading’ works of literature or aspects of sexual behaviour through a particular authorial authority but rather through the further exposition of the possibilities of the method, and the intrinsic connections, that Freud explored. Throughout much of the twentieth century both Freud and Marx were interpreted, often with very considerable hostility, as definitive and certain in their conclusions. One of the few (in the view of this writer) positive features of what is described as post-modernism is that it has given a greater status within intellectual life to the ambiguous and the imprecise: in this way the work of both Freud and Marx has regained that element of the speculative that can be detected through a lens which is not distorted by over-determined conclusions about the narratives and circumstances of history.

That space for speculation and ambiguity, a characteristic of the imaginative work of modernism that took some considerable time to manifest itself within formal academic disciplines, was significantly assisted by women and by those men who were not afraid to consider openly the extent of the range and complexity of human emotions and relations. In this context, a context formed by the work of writers such as Virginia Woolf, psychoanalysts such as Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, political figures such as Rosa Luxemburg and artists such as Kathy Kollwitz, the feminine as a collective status was given agency and presence. In the work of the German artist Kathy Kollwitz we see the way in which a perception of the world, inspired by that sense of being an ‘outsider’ that was derived from being a woman in a world dominated by men, brought together both resistance and rejection of aspects of that world together with an assertion of those connections – between violence and sexuality – that inform the section edited by Marsha Henry on *War, Violence and Militarization*. Those forms of violence, as Kollwitz attempted to bring together in her drawings and etchings, were various, from the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht to the ‘everyday’ violence of poverty.⁷

In an early edition of *Feminist Review* an article appeared with the title ‘Wiping the Floor with Theory’ (Kaluzyńska, 1980: 27–54). The essay was a contribution to debates in feminism in the last decades of the twentieth century about questions of feminist politics and feminist theory, many women arguing that the over-theorization of feminism and feminist issues would make feminism a province of the well-educated and privileged. The now considerable presence of feminist scholars in universities throughout much of the world would suggest (while also acknowledging that employment in the academy is a privileged form of work) that some of this prediction has come true. But two arguments also intrude, both of which disturb comfortable assumptions about the meaning of feminism and accusations that suggest its ‘betrayal’. The first is that feminism and feminists were never entirely explicitly hostile to the economic order of industrial capitalism; indeed, for many feminists the crucial engagements were with culture; what Michele Barrett described as the ‘cultural turn’ in sociology was indicative of the way in which there was a considerable consensus in the late twentieth century that what was somewhat euphemistically known as the ‘mixed’ economy was the inevitable form of political economy (Barrett, 1992: 201–19). What disappeared (or became less publicly present) at this time was that tradition in feminism that had linked structural inequality with gender equality.

In an unsigned editorial published in 1982 various writers in *Feminist Review* reflected, with regret, on the erosion of the relationship between feminism and socialism. In a sentence that is as relevant today as it was then they wrote:

The continuing development of multi-national firms answerable to no government is leading to the pauperisation of vast sectors of the globe.⁸

What this comment demonstrates particularly clearly – as well as the ability of writers in *Feminist Review* to define central and ongoing trajectories of social life – is that feminism has never been afraid to engage with issues apart from those of gender difference. The point is crucial for our understanding of feminist theory: it is a theoretical position which casts its remit across diverse contexts of analysis. The analysis may ‘read’ aspects of the social world through the lens of gender but the focus is varied and wide-ranging.

But, to many people (certainly in the global north), the new battleground around gender was that of cultural change, of the ‘empowerment’ of women and the more active integration into the model of actively independent economic individual. Rafts of legislation about gender equality reinforced a sense of progress about the relevance of that model for changes in gender relations. In this, feminists could rightly claim considerable credit for organizing and mobilizing to ensure that these changes took place. However, from this emerged three assumptions, all of them questionable and questioned. First, that the site of feminist intervention should be concentrated rather more in the global south, a view which has attracted considerable criticism and fury from feminists across the planet who see in this a new form of cultural imperialism.⁹ A second assumption was closely aligned to this: the view that feminism in the global north had become redundant; in the face of the brave new world of ‘modern’, ‘emancipated’ women there was no need for further intervention. The third was that feminism, and its principles, had become so structurally engrained in the institutions and institutional practices of the global north that institutions and institutional practice now enshrined feminist principles (Walby, 2011: chs 4 and 5). All these issues have attracted considerable debate. But what remains is the question of the extent to which there are aspects of feminism and feminist theory that are entirely compatible with neo-liberalism (Fraser, 2009: 97–117). Among those points of coincidence are the theoretical validation of the individual and an agenda that legitimates choice. Individual choice is the key ideological and rhetorical formulation for the status of the individual in a neo-liberal market economy just as much as ideas about ‘choice’ have always been, from the Enlightenment onwards, a central part of the vocabulary of feminism.

From this it is possible to visualize feminism, and feminist theory, as part of the flowering of ‘mature’ capitalism, a form of political economy that can allow at least some flowers to bloom. Such a picture, which some might read as evidence of the ultimately positive virtue of the market economy, can, however, also be read as both a detraction and an under-estimation of the potential, both achieved and inherent, of feminist theory. To make one immediate point: the heavy weight of conservatism that sits on all societies will always attempt to minimize what radical visions of the politics of the Left have achieved. The other – but in this case similar – side of this coin is the intense anxiety created about various kinds of possibilities of change in various forms of the gender order: if a government in Saudi Arabia can countenance the idea that women driving cars will undermine an entire social world or if, in the case of some groups in the United States, the view that civil marriages for people of the same biological sex will destroy the very fabric of society can be entertained, it is possible to see how considerable are concerns around the organization of gender.

It is in the light of these – and other – cases where a ‘natural’ order of gender is asserted and legitimated through various forms of quasi-rational argument that the need for feminist theory

is particularly apparent. But it is also in cases such as these that the theoretical acquires its most valuable identity: where it is not an exercise in semantics or an intervention in obscure debate but an exercise that unites passionate and informed rationality with the wish to reach goals other than those which are of immediate value to a particular individual. In this sense, feminist theory (despite attempts to extend the signification of the term 'feminist' to contexts of rampant self-enrichment) has at its core a concern with both the identification and the transformation of those ideas which regulate and enforce gender equality. This locates feminist theory as a truly transcendent form of knowledge: one that speaks of individual cases (be they the subjects of development policies or Hollywood films) but does so in the dialectical terms of practice and reflection that unite people, circumstances and understanding.

NOTES

- 1 See the discussion in Hemmings, 2011 and Madhok et al., 2013.
- 2 There are various accounts of the ways in which feminism has become an integral part of individual biographies. See, for example, Segal, 2007; Wilson, 1979 and Rowbotham, 1989.
- 3 See, for example, Midgley, 1992; 2007 and Alonso, 1993; and on more recent protests see Roseneil, 1995; 2000.
- 4 An important account of the various alliances of gender and race is given in Feimster, 2009.
- 5 In that same volume Beauvoir makes a particularly interesting comment about the cultural politics of the west. She writes: 'The only reality that the bourgeois writer seeks to take into account is the inner life' (Simons and Timmerman, 2012: 175).
- 6 The attacks – and defences – of Marx and Freud by feminists are legion and there is no single account which adequately represents them. However, important attempts to make the case for the relevance of Freud were Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974) and the essays by Jacqueline Rose collected in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (1986). Many of the articles published in *Feminist Review* between 1980 and 1990 discussed the question of the relationship between socialism and feminism and important essays were published by (among others) Mary McIntosh, Angela Weir, Anne Phillips and Michelle Barrett. In an editorial of 1982 the editors wrote (of contemporary politics) 'What can happen to women if our interests are not clearly and explicitly defended in the course of revolutionary struggle?', a rhetorical question which retains its importance to this day.
- 7 Writing of her 1920 drawing, *The Sick Woman and her Children*, Kollwitz wrote 'Malnutrition has made this woman very sick. She could be cured with proper care. The food to save her life is available in this country, but she cannot afford the exorbitant prices asked for it. What will become of her children? Every day profiteers are sapping the strength of countless people and preparing them for a premature grave' (Kearns, 1976: 163).
- 8 Anon., 1982.
- 9 Two of the many important – and now canonical – contributions here are Mohanty, 2003:17–42 and Spivak, 1999.

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Epistemology and Marginality

Sumi Madhok and Mary Evans

For a 'Handbook of Feminist Theory', a section on epistemology is important for several reasons. Forms of epistemological enquiries, their resultant knowledges and the nature of sociality these uphold are central to feminist thinking not only because of their power to define who gets to be a 'subject' and a 'knower' but also which knowledges and phenomena are deemed valid 'objects' of study and consequently worthy of recognition, authority and legitimacy. Epistemological enquiries and processes uphold a particular view of the world, endorse certain forms of gender relations and assume a specific set of hierarchical social and political relations as standard. Therefore, in insisting upon uncovering the identity of the 'knower' and the nature of 'knowing', feminist theory is committed to knowledge as linked both to power and to a certain politics.

In conceiving this section, we focus in particular on the links between epistemology

and marginality. In emphasizing the question of epistemic marginality we encouraged the contributors to conceive their pieces in light of the associations that feminist scholars have drawn between the production of knowledge and continuing social injustices including those resulting from the setting up of epistemic hierarchies and the production of marginal statuses, identities and knowledges and from the societal impact of deep epistemic divides – between those who are designated as 'knowers' and those deemed to be bereft of the capacity to 'know' – on forms of epistemic violence and everyday modes of oppression. Feminist writing about epistemic marginality and exclusion is, of course, not new. In writing about marginality and knowledge-production feminist scholars have reflected on questions of who can be 'Knowers', what is regarded as 'Knowing' and what can be 'Known' (Hawkesworth, 1989), and drawn on their own institutional and epistemic marginality to note at least three things: the

marginal status of feminist epistemology as a legitimate 'field of enquiry'; the marginalization of feminist epistemologists as a group (not least in philosophy departments, where epistemology is a central field of enquiry and curriculum), and the marginal status of feminist and gender studies as knowledge-producing or a 'discipline'. To be sure, while the above can be seen as empirical 'evidence' of the way in which epistemic processes and relations work in the 'academy', feminist scholars use this empirical fact to ask broader questions about marginality that are political, structural and ethical. But why does it matter that the connection between knowledge and marginality – the processes of knowledge-production and legitimation, who produces it, for whom and to what end – be opened up for critical and democratic scrutiny? It matters because feminist epistemology not only concerns itself with critique and producing new forms of knowledge; it is also deeply invested in the transformation of existing inequitable societal relations. And, therefore, it follows that, if theory is both a way of seeing the world and providing a blueprint for political action, then the world it illuminates, acknowledges and seeks to define cannot simply replicate the one that is the already normative, the always already privileged, the powerful and the authoritative. Furthermore, in order for theory to be transformative, including implicitly engaged in the transformation of unequal gender relations, then it must serve up a toolbox for challenging existing exploitative structural logics of the normative order in order to reorient it explicitly towards social justice and an ethical politics.

Overall, the intellectual oeuvre of feminist epistemology includes both modes as well as the processes of knowledge-production, but it is in its continual insistence on 'knowing' the 'knower', on making 'subjectivity' count (Code, 1993 and in this volume) and on unmasking and assessing the epistemic impact of the 'sex of the knower' (Code, 1993; this volume) on the nature of knowing that feminist epistemology has made important

interventions, not least in uncovering the 'politics of epistemic practice' (Fricker, 2007: 2). Consequently, feminist epistemologists have brought under their epistemic scanner processes of knowledge-production such as the 'scientific method' and its accompanying values of objectivity, universality, scientificity and 'value freeness', examined the politics of 'epistemic relations' and 'epistemic conduct' and insisted on discussing 'the political nature of epistemology' (Fricker, 2007; Alcoff, 1993) itself. The essays in this section reflect the concern with both the content and the processes of knowledge-production. The papers also reflect a multidisciplinary interest in epistemological questions among scholars working in feminist and gender studies. However, they neither provide an exhaustive 'coverage' of the field of feminist epistemology nor do they present reviews of all the important interventions; but they do build on the latter and put forward new directions for feminist epistemological work to consider. In this we do not attempt to replicate those important anthologies edited by Helen Crowley and Susan Himmelweit (1992) and Alcoff and Potter (1993) but, rather, suggest ways of taking forward and developing various debates.

Over the years, feminists have become accustomed to invoking epistemic harms and to reading and writing about 'epistemic injustice' (Fricker, 2007), 'epistemic violence' (Spivak, 1988) and 'epistemic scandal' (Chow, 2006). The intellectual potency of this language derives its poignancy and urgency from the structural injustices that order the organization of everyday life. As we write the introduction to this section, aspects of 'epistemic and testimonial injustice' (Fricker, 2007), 'politics of testimony' (Code, this volume), the withholding of 'epistemic agency' and the reinforcing of epistemic marginality, are in operation across the globe in now all-too-familiar revealing and sinister ways, and not least in a courtroom in Sanford, Florida, where the trial of the murdered US black teenager Trayvon Martin has just concluded. We cannot afford

to ignore formations of marginality and the epistemic questions they raise; these have, as feminist scholars have powerfully argued and reminded us, a strong and enduring material basis.

The emergence of the language of epistemic harm, of course, is itself an outcome of a long struggle not only against prevalent epistemological practices and dogmas but also against the reproduction of existing hierarchies and of coloniality within feminist theory itself. The critique of feminism's and of feminist theories' 'internal colonialism' is now strongly registered (Mohanty, 1991; hooks, 2000; Collins, 2000; Lorde, 2001; Rich, 1986; Spivak, 1988; Crenshaw, 1989; Lugones, 2010; Bhavnani, 1993; Chow, 2006), and, as bell hooks notes (2000), the feminist movement is 'the most self-critical' among all movements of social justice, but despite this self-criticism and even self-reflexivity within epistemic practices, it is hardly short of a 'persisting epistemic scandal' that much of feminist epistemology continues to be 'self-referential' and to exhibit a 'strange complacency of its provincial contents' (Chow, 2006: 13), only 'telling feminist stories' (Hemmings, 2005) about particular epistemic histories, cultures and practices. In this respect we acknowledge the limitations of this section – nearly all the essays here focus upon ongoing epistemic debates within feminist epistemology from metropolitan locations and engage epistemic questions and scholarship that are rooted firmly within the 'western canonical' tradition. While this shortcoming of feminist epistemological investigations cannot be understood in isolation from present geopolitical, historical and economic contexts – in fact, knowledge-production, pedagogical, research and institutional priorities and are conditioned by these – an acknowledgement of one's complicity in reproducing and keeping in place intellectual hierarchies, however, can be an important first step. Many essays in this section are deeply troubled by questions of coloniality and critical of 'othering' practices in knowledge-production while also accepting their own structural implication within these. They are

in the best tradition of feminist scholarship – not only reflexive but also concerned with questions of accountability and responsibility. But the difficulty remains nevertheless: how to resolve this 'epistemic scandal'? The reader will, we hope, understand if we refrain from providing simple and ready-to-use solutions here. For we doubt that these exist. One thing we're certain of, though, is that simply resorting to what Sandra Harding referred to in another context as 'add and stir' is not going to do. In other words, to provide spaces for 'other' forms or modes of knowledge-production in a mechanical way, without attempting to show how these either effectively query or even displace the epistemic premises upon which questions of knowledge-production occur, hardly constitutes a 'solution'. In this section, contributors re-examine existing epistemic arguments and recalibrate epistemic questions and materials not by seeking to displace their own privilege (as if they could!) but through acknowledging their epistemic provincialism, their geopolitical and institutional location as also the raced and classed identities of their readings.

By acknowledging that epistemology is political (Alcoff, 1993) and that knowledge is not 'value free' but is always a product of certain forms of political investments, these essays build on what is now a basic building block of feminist epistemological analysis – namely, that gender is not a unitary category of analysis but one that is mediated through the intersection of race, class, sexualities and other forms of marginality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000). This epistemic insight, that gender intersects with other forms of marginality, has been heralded as the most 'significant' conceptual contribution of the last twenty years, since it not only uncovered (feminist) epistemology's 'irrepressible connection with social power' (Fricker, 2007: 2) but also dealt a blow to the 'theoretical framework of individualism and compulsory rational idealization' predominantly favoured in epistemic arguments (see also Code in this section). Thinking seriously about marginality has challenged the methodological

individualism as well as the assumptions of 'human homogeneity' that underpin epistemological enquiry and unmasked the processes through which subordinate groups are denied subjectivity and status as 'knowers'. Gayatri Spivak (1988) has written powerfully about the 'epistemic violence' that accompanies the silencing of marginalized groups and Patricia Collins writes evocatively about the denial of subjectivity and the cognitive competence of Black women (Collins, 2000). bell hooks (2000) writes of the need 'to develop feminist theory that emerges from 'individuals who have knowledge of both margin and center' (2000: xvii) and for 'understanding marginality' as a 'position and place of resistance' that is 'crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonised people' (1990: 150–51). Standpoint theorists such as Sandra Harding, for instance, write in favour of a methodology that involves 'starting thought from the lives of marginalised peoples', arguing that this will reveal more of the unexamined assumptions influencing science and generate not only more critical questions but also a 'strong objectivity' that would both recognize the social situatedness of knowledge and also critically evaluate it in order 'to determine which social situations tend to generate the most objective claims'. For standpoint theorists, the key questions that are asked, investigated and indeed addressed by academic disciplines are those which affect the privileged and the powerful. And therefore, by implication, the intellectual investments are those which seek to entrench privilege in place and not displace it. As a corrective, standpoint theorists propose that if we are to challenge privileged views of the world then we will have to start producing knowledge about the world from the standpoint of those who are marginalized. But can the claim to epistemic privilege, which is the claim to speak in an authoritative way by marginalized groups, put forward a distinct and discrete voice of the oppressed, a voice that can challenge the authority of the oppressor? Bar On (1993) cautions that, in fact, it cannot. Although the 'claim to epistemic privilege' may be deployed by the

oppressed as a 'tool', she follows Audre Lorde in arguing that it remains, in the final instance, 'a master's tool ... because when the oppressed feel a need to authorize speech, they are acting on feelings that are a function of their own oppression' (Bar On, 1993: 97). Writing in this volume, Lorraine Code, one of the pioneers of feminist epistemology, encourages us to think of 'multiple marginalities' while also pointing out that not all 'centres' are equally epistemically privileged. Although these 'multiple marginalities', she writes, 'may appear to operate singly in some instances, often they overlap or are interwoven in silencing, ignoring, or discrediting certain voices and points of view'. Readers will recall of course, that Code (1993) had directed one of the early challenges at epistemological thinking when she asked whether the 'sex of the knower' mattered in any epistemic way. For Code, asking this question alone 'gives rise to a range of questions about knowledge and subjectivity ... no longer is the "knower" imaginable as a self contained, infinitely replicable "individual" making universally valid knowledge claims from a "god's eye" position removed from the incidental features and the power and privilege structures of the physical-social world' (Code, this volume: 10). Through her now famous formulation, *S* knows that *P*, Code argued that contemporary epistemologies, particularly their positivist–empiricist varieties, not only insisted on 'value neutrality', 'pure objectivity' and 'perspectiveless' knowing but were also underpinned by the idea of a universal human nature or 'human homogeneity' (Code, this volume). As opposed to the 'hegemonic model of mastery' (Code, this volume) that dominates mainstream Anglo-American epistemology, Code writes that, as most of our knowledge is interactive and dependent on others, 'knowing others' is a much more significant epistemic practice and that 'taking subjectivity into account' would reveal a very different 'geography of the epistemic terrain'. In her contribution, Code, reflects on her seminal essay while casting a theoretically expansive eye over questions of 'centrality

and marginality' within feminist 'cognitive practices' and also those of mainstream epistemic thinking. She writes that subjectivity matters and that 'knowledges are situated', and that acknowledging this fact 'opens up' thinking on the epistemological implications of 'multiple intersecting specificities of subjectivity and positionality' and thereby, into questions about credibility, testimony, marginality and epistemic responsibility

Astrida Neimanis, in this volume, is also concerned with questions of responsibility and accountability. She points out that the 'master model' that informs epistemological thinking is held in place by a conceptual framework organized around the oppositional division between 'nature' and 'culture'. This binary division is not a benign separation but is value-laden, inscribing value to one (i.e., culture) and 'denigrating' the other (i.e., nature). Neimanis writes that this nature/culture distinction is not a reference to discrete entities alone but has come to stand in for a whole host of representational practices and relations whereby associations with 'culture' indicate 'masculinity', 'western' and 'cosmopolitan ways of life', while 'nature' is used to denote associational links with 'femininity', primitiveness and backward, non-progressive world views and life worlds. Neimanis provides a 'schematization' of the 'various feminist positions', outlines a 'detailed evaluation of "new materialist" positions on nature/culture' and argues that if feminist theory is to realize a much more expansive idea of ethical and political accountability then it must bring in as part of its commitment to intersectional analyses not only environmental concerns but also non-human others.

In her contribution Gayle Letherby, following Lorraine Code, argues in favour of foregrounding subjectivity in the research process, or for a 'theorised subjectivity', pointing out that 'political complexities of subjectivities and their inevitable involvement in the research process' render the search for a 'definitive objectivity' ultimately

unsuccessful. Letherby explains 'theorised subjectivity' as one that 'requires the constant, critical interrogation of our personhood – both intellectual and personal – within the production of the knowledge'. As distinct from standpoint theorists, Letherby is not really interested in pursuing 'strong objectivity' or, indeed, in finding more theoretically adequate ways of pursuing objectivity; instead, she argues for starting from the point of making research 'value explicit' rather than 'value free'. Thus, theorized subjectivity starts by recognizing the value (as in worth, rather than moral value) – both positive and negative – of the subjective (Letherby, this volume).

Sabine Grenz's paper also examines the process of knowledge-production. In her contribution she reflects on the flow of power within the research process and, in relationships between the researcher and the researched, in particular. In her research on sexuality and on clients of prostitutes, she writes that although feminist research has demonstrated sensitivity in relation to intersectional workings of power and has paid attention to minimizing power differentials in research relationships, it has not always been successful in negotiating 'reversed power relations' or when the researcher herself is marginalized, for instance, through being subject to racist and sexist behaviour. But, as Grenz argues, a research project should not be seen as sealed from the prevailing power social dynamics but is in fact comprehensively 'integrated' and plugged into the 'surrounding discourses on the topic in question as well as related issues'.

However, there remains at least one prior question to that of making subjectivity matter epistemically and it is this: whose values and experiences are allowed to be brought into the research process? And, relatedly, how do we access these values? Acknowledging the subjectivity of knowers and their different locations means acknowledging that knowers are positioned differently and that their positioning is an outcome of existing social divisions.

Acknowledging differently located knowers and their different subject positionings draws into serious question knowledge accounts that claim not only a universality across time and space but also an unmediated neutrality of knowledge produced from archimedean positions which view the world from 'nowhere' in particular and by extension, therefore, from everywhere and for everyone. The question that begets is: how do we think about difference in ways that are sociologically illuminating, intellectually meaningful and also politically useful? And, furthermore, if identities and oppressions are intersectionally experienced, how do we access and articulate experience? And what sort of epistemic weight do we accord experience? Sharing women's 'lived experience' has been an important feature of feminist consciousness-raising exercises and of building 'sisterhood'. However, questions of whose experience counted soon came to the fore, not least as a result of the emerging debates over intersectionality, race, class and postcoloniality within feminist scholarship. Epistemic claims based on an identitarian reality found themselves under critical scrutiny by several post-structuralist feminist scholars, with Joan Scott's essay titled 'Experience' becoming the most paradigmatic of this critique. In the essay, Scott cautions against using experience as 'foundational', as self-evident and as something authentic always already present and waiting to be tapped into, suggesting instead that we change our object of study from events and 'reality' to discursive systems that shape experience. For example, alongside studying the experience of American slaves in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, she writes, we should study the discursive systems of racism and capitalism that produced slavery as an effect. Scott concludes by calling for the study of the processes of subject creation, not just experience itself, and writes, "it is not individuals who have experiences, but subjects who are constituted through experience" (Scott, 1992: 25–6). In her contribution to this section, Sonia Kruks revisits Scott's critique and

reassesses the epistemological role of experience through a phenomenological lens. According to Kruks, the 'lived body' is profoundly imbricated in the 'ethical and political project of feminism' and, in fact, it would be 'hard to imagine feminist political practices in which embodied orientations and affective experience play little part'. However, Kruks cautions against regarding experience as 'natural' or immediate and argues for experience to be explored and theorized through phenomenological inquiry. According to Kruks, phenomenology offers access to significant registers of women's lives and to embodied and affective ways of knowing, judging, and acting that cannot be grasped by discourse analysis, or by other objectivizing approaches to experience. She points to the possibilities for building bridges of solidarity that a recognition of the inter-subjective quality of lived bodies offer, but is equally careful to point out that in a complex and hierarchically organized world, phenomenology also enables an understanding of the limits of empathy and the dangers of over-identification with and objectification of the 'other' that can result from not acknowledging one's own location, 'distance' and privilege.

While problematizing experience is an important aspect of the politics of subjectivity and identity, we are still frequently confronted with the question 'what do women want today?' From the popular media to key psychoanalytic texts, this question occupies our popular and political imaginations. Campbell argues that this question is, in fact, a 'key question for third wave feminisms' and for feminist epistemologies. Engaging with the question of what 'we want today', writes Campbell, means not only asking how we come to 'know ourselves' but also how we know 'our others'. 'Third Wave Epistemologies', writes Campbell, is not meant to indicate a 'fixed referent' or a 'framework' or a 'taxonomy'; it is, rather, a 'collective' project which seeks to examine the intersection between the politics of subjectivity and the politics of knowledge. In her contribution she sets out elements of what she calls a

‘post-Lacanian feminist epistemology’, which, she argues, will help us negotiate the relationship between ‘feminist knowing subjects’, feminist epistemic practices and feminist politics. She writes: ‘A feminist psychoanalytic approach can help to understand the operation of ...social fictions of femininity and the pleasures and pains of these ‘feminine’ desires. However, it also reveals that the operation of feminist knowledges can intervene in these discourses, and how these knowledges can symbolize more liberating forms of what women might want. This symbolization of new social subjects and relations represents both the most radical promise and the most difficult task for third wave feminist epistemologies in these times of neoliberal politics and consumer cultures’

But what if the answer to the question ‘what do women want today?’ is, in effect, that what they really want is religion? How will feminist epistemology respond to such an answer? Not very well, as it happens. Both Sían Hawthorne and Mary Evans examine the fraught history of feminist responses to this answer. Sían Hawthorne writes that, when it comes to religious subjectivities, feminist sensitivity to intersectionally positioned subjects somehow seems to get temporarily abandoned. Feminist scholars are deeply invested in and thereby unable to extricate themselves from the well-entrenched narrative that posits an unquestioned ‘inimical relationship’ between religion and gender oppression; in fact, religion, Hawthorne points out, is never seen in an emancipatory frame, and only always as oppressive – the familiar argument being that the more religious observant societies are, the more observably gender oppressive they are likely to be. The important point that Hawthorne makes is this: religion is not only epistemological but also an ontological marker/maker of difference and, therefore, epistemic judgements on religious subjectivities are not simply epistemological but also carry a civilizational weight. As a consequence, “‘religion’ has become an identity marker as well as an intellectual category’

and, therefore, ‘our focus cannot merely be to be concerned with epistemological reflection; it must also necessarily be directed towards the ontological dimensions of category formation ...’. In her contribution, Mary Evans notes that while debates over social progress measured in the successful mobilizations of secular world views and the consequent rolling back of religious ones have more often than not been played out on the terrain of gender, the ‘negative’ representation of religious socialities within secular, humanist intellectual projects is not without resonances in feminist theory too. In fact, as Saba Mahmood has argued (2005), the normative bias in favour of the secular liberal subject has resulted in the denial of subjecthood to religious women. The epistemic divide between religion and feminist subjectivity, however, writes Evans, has more often than not been overplayed and there are, at least epistemologically speaking, areas of both ‘similarity’ as well as difference between the epistemic structures of both religion and feminism. For both, ‘the transcendence of the limits of the human person’ is an important goal – all world religions ‘encourage the possibility that each human being is malleable into a form’, and feminism, too, demands a future different than one determined by one’s biology. Secondly, Evans points out that both religious and feminist epistemologies begin their enquiry into the world from the starting point of social relations, although, of course, they diverge quite radically both in their analysis of these and also in relation to prescribed paths and goals of emancipation. Feminist theorists, writes Evans, should note that religious discourse is neither stable nor coherent and therefore offers many possibilities for engagement – an engagement that feminists must urgently take up if they are not only to avoid misdescriptions of the relationship between the secular and the modern but also to both ‘recognize’ and actively engage with the growing ‘legitimacy’ that religious discourse is acquiring across the globe.

CONCLUSION

In this section our purpose has been to explore various issues associated with the concept of a 'feminist' epistemology. What emerges from the various papers is both agreement and dissent: agreement that the question of gender and gender relations has to become an issue for the discussion of epistemology, not least because feminist theory has so convincingly demonstrated the presence of gendered relations of power within human interaction. This does not mean, as might once have been understood, that epistemological transformation can be achieved through the challenge to male power, but that the dialectic of human gender relations has to become part of any epistemology. The papers here all suggest ways of considering this impact, not least of which is a critical discussion of the concept of a specific 'feminist' epistemology, one which is somehow divorced from fixed assumptions about the relations of gender. We propose that taking forward the importance of gendered epistemologies is crucial to the development of less partial understandings of human existence.

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Feminist Epistemology and the Politics of Knowledge: Questions of Marginality

Lorraine Code

Epistemology was a late-comer to feminist analysis and critique. Although various explanations for its tardiness might be advanced, central among them must surely be the intransigence of a conviction that, while ethics and politics might well be shaped by gender relations and other human 'differences', knowledge worthy of the (honorific) title must transcend all such specificities. Thus, although feminist ethical and political theory were rapidly growing areas of inquiry during the 1960s and 1970s, only in the 1980s was a set of questions and proposals articulated to address the possibility that there could, after all, be so seemingly oxymoronic an area of inquiry as feminist epistemology. In twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy there were good reasons for such resistance. Epistemologists sought to establish universal, necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence of knowledge in general: knowledge that could serve as a model at which knowledge-seeking as such should aim – that could yield empirical certainty, and

silence the sceptic. Any hint of relativism such as is implicit in the suggestion that sex – a non-intellectual, non-rational, individual characteristic of putative knowers – could play a constitutive part in the production of knowledge threatened to undermine the founding principles of 'the epistemological project'. It unsettled taken-for-granted beliefs about human sameness across putatively incidental and inconsequential bodily differences, and thus appeared to contest the very possibility of achieving knowledge worthy of the name. It is no surprise, therefore, that few epistemologists, feminists or other, would have given an affirmative answer to my 1981 question: 'Is the sex of the knower epistemologically significant?' (Code, 1981). Indeed, to some interlocutors the implications of responding in the affirmative seemed, in those early days, to suggest that if indeed the sex of the knower were declared epistemologically significant, then it would be to the detriment of women's aspirations to knowledgeability. It would consolidate the time-worn assumption that women could not

know in the well-established, descriptive and normative, sense of the word.

Yet whether such a confirmation would amount to reaffirming women's epistemic marginality is a more subtle issue. So long as the view prevails that women cannot know according to the highest criteria for establishing knowledge, it seems that they are in fact not just marginalized but excluded, confined somewhere beyond the limits of both marginality and centrality. This way of putting the point may exceed the parameters of an analysis designated specifically to address marginality, but I think it does not stretch the purpose of the discussion to observe that in at least one sense of the word, in one central exclusionary preserve – namely, universities and other institutions of higher education – when women are refused admission then the implication seems to be that they cannot know, that they are incapable of, not marginalized within, the kinds of knowledge disseminated there. So even moving to the fringes in the form of women's colleges, colleges of 'home economics', nursing schools is, in the institutions of knowledge-production and validation, already a move to the margins – if indeed only there. When women are restricted to studying/learning in such institutions, which claim less prestige than universities, they clearly are marginalized, both institutionally and epistemologically (cf. Rossiter, 1982: esp. 65–70, 240).

Nonetheless, with respect to the content and methodology of the empirical knowledge that functions as exemplary for early-to-mid-twentieth-century epistemologists, both descriptively and normatively, the contention that women are marginalized is apt in the sense – and this is no small point – that the subject *S*, in the standard *S*-knows-that-*p* formula in which propositional knowledge claims are ordinarily stated, is presumptively male to the extent that there is no need even to mention his maleness. That he is white and of the privileged classes is also an uncontested given. Thus women enter the philosophical scene as would-be knowers

usually in token substitutions of female for male pronouns: instead of 'Sam knows that the book is green' we read 'Sally knows that the book is green'. Ordinarily, such knowledge claims are made about perceptual 'simples': they refer to medium-sized physical objects that are presumptively part of everyday life in the materially replete societies tacitly taken for granted as the backdrop for references to such knowing. Normally, too, the sex of the knower would in such circumstances be regarded as being of no greater significance than the size of her or his feet, while her or his race, ethnicity, sexuality, age would figure not at all in the analysis. In short, the formal structure of empiricist/post-positivist twentieth-century Anglo-American epistemology prior to the feminist challenges of the 1980s was such as to reinforce settled presumptions of human homogeneity.

The idea that the *sex* of the knower could be epistemologically significant gives rise to a range of questions about knowledge and subjectivity which were just as startling at first posing, but have come to be integral to subsequent feminist inquiry. No longer is 'the knower' imaginable as a self-contained, infinitely replicable 'individual' making universally valid knowledge claims from a 'god's eye' position removed from the incidental features and the power and privilege structures of the physical–social world. Once inquiry shifts to focus (following Haraway, 1988) on 'situated knowledges', it is no longer feasible to assume before the fact which aspects of situatedness will be significant for the production, evaluation and circulation of knowledge. Inquiry opens out into analyses of multiple intersecting specificities of subjectivity and positionality in their social, political and thence epistemological implications for the production of knowledge and knowers; and into questions about credibility, marginality, epistemic responsibility and the politics of testimony, none of which would have been meaningful in the discourse of orthodox epistemology. My analysis in this essay pivots on these questions.

BEGINNINGS

In the mid-1980s Sandra Harding, in *The Science Question in Feminism* (Harding, 1986), began to map the developing theoretical divisions in feminist epistemological inquiry, first distinguishing between feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint theory. Empiricists, on this analysis, sought to develop a method of evidence-gathering that would be cleansed of androcentrism, paying attention to evidence neglected or discounted as worthy of notice in received theories of knowledge. The idea was that an empiricism committed to objective evidence-gathering and justification, yet informed by feminist ideology, could produce more adequate knowledge than classical empiricism, which is ignorant of its complicity in sustaining a ubiquitous sex/gender system. An enhanced sensitivity to such issues enables feminists to enlist empiricist tools to expose the sexism, racism and other 'isms' that (often silently) inform knowing. Such exposures often depend on examining the so-called 'context of discovery', where aspects of a situation, inquiry or experiment are singled out for investigation, yet where sex/gender specific features may be ignored or deemed irrelevant from the get-go, so to speak. A well-known example from the 1990s is the tardy recognition in cardiac medicine that symptoms signalling heart disease in women commonly failed to show up in standard tests developed from testing male patients alone. Only in consequence of persistent feminist lobbying were testing practices revised to address specifically female manifestations of the disease (Harding, 1984). Investigating assumptions that structure and pervade processes of experimental design – contexts of discovery – often expose limitations whose effects are analogously gender-specific. The 'strong objectivity' feminist empiricists and standpoint theorists demand, if differently, opens the way to generating more inclusive, and hence more just, inquiry than older conceptions of objectivity had allowed (cf. Harding, 1993).

Hence, for example, in Helen Longino's social empiricism (1993), it is communities,

not individuals, who are the knowers: their background assumptions shape knowledge as process and product. In genetic research, Longino shows how assumption-(value-) driven differences in knowledge-production contest the possibility of value-neutrality. Yet she endorses community respect for evidence and accountable, collaborative cognitive agency. Similarly, Lynn Hankinson Nelson (1990) develops from (Quinean) 'naturalised epistemology' a neo-empiricism for which again communities, not individuals, are the primary knowers; and knowers come to evidence through webs of belief, open to communal endorsement and critique. Because those who are socially marginalized cannot realize their emancipatory goals without understanding the intractable aspects and the malleable, contestable features of the world, they have to achieve a fit between knowledge and 'reality', even when 'reality' consists in such social artefacts as racism, power, oppression or pay equity. Because an empiricism alert to gender-specificity (and, latterly, a range of other specificities) is well equipped to achieve just such knowledge, politically informed inquiry, according to Harding, yields a better empiricism than the received view allows, based in what she has called 'strong objectivity'.

Standpoint theorists, by contrast, were turning their attention to the historical-material positioning of women's practices and experiences. For such theorists as Nancy Hartsock (1983) and Hilary Rose (1983), empiricists do not have at their disposal the conceptual tools required to address the historical-material diversity from which people produce knowledge. Standard-setting knowledge in western societies derives from the experiences of white, middle-class, educated men, with women (like the marxian proletariat) occupying underclass epistemic positions. As capitalism 'naturalizes' the subordination of the proletariat, patriarchy 'naturalizes' the subordination of women; and as examining material-social realities from the standpoint of the proletariat denaturalizes these

assumptions, so starting from women's lives denaturalizes the patriarchal order. A feminist standpoint is a hard-won product of consciousness-raising and social-political engagement in which the knowledge that enables the oppressed to survive under oppression becomes a resource for social transformation.

While these two positions seemed to capture the principal differences between feminist approaches to epistemology in the late 1980s, neither empiricist nor standpoint feminism succeeded in resolving all of the issues. Empiricists were unable fully to address the power-saturated circumstances of diversely located knowers or to pose interpretive questions about how evidence is discursively constituted and whose evidence it suppresses in the process. Nor, in the absence of a unified feminism, could standpoint theorists avoid obliterating differences. The theory's 'locatedness' offered a version of social reality as specific and hence as limited as any other, albeit distinguished by its awareness of that specificity. But empiricism's commitment to revealing the concealed effects of gender-specificity in knowledge-production cannot be gainsaid; nor can standpoint theory's production of faithful, critical, analyses of women's experiences, with its focus on how hegemonic values legitimate oppression. Thus, in the years since empiricism and standpoint theory seemed to cover the territory, with postmodernism addressing anti-epistemological challenges to both, feminists have found these alternatives neither mutually exclusive, nor able, separately or together, to explain the sexual politics of knowledge-production and circulation. Indeed, perhaps a more accurate reading of the positioning of all three approaches – feminist empiricism, standpoint theory and postmodernism – would be to emphasize the postmodern implications of all three as they are manifested, for example, in a sometimes tacit, sometimes explicit rejection of the very possibility of dislocated (=un-situated) knowledge, epistemic individualism, perspective-less a-political knowing and top-down positivistic-empiricist

methods of inquiry. Among its commendable aspects are an acknowledgement of the productive, innovatively postmodern implications of feminist inquiry that distances itself from the 'essentialisms' that characterize modernity, with its convictions about the singularity of method, the replicability of knowers, the affect-free nature of knowledge-production and the universality of knowledge worthy of the name.

I have noted that a commitment to 'strong objectivity' seems to inform both feminist empiricism and standpoint theory, albeit differently. Indeed, cross-fertilizations across disciplines and methods have often proven more productive than adherence to any methodological orthodoxy. Nor do all feminists cognizant of the differences that difference makes hope to achieve a unified standpoint, given that it is impossible to aggregate such differences either in their empirical detail or their effects, and imperialistic to attempt to do so. Hence, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) advocated an 'outsider-within' black feminist standpoint: an Afro-centered epistemology which she adduces as exemplary of how knowledge produced in a subordinated and marginalized group can foster resistance to hegemonic norms while producing knowledge good of its kind; and Maria Lugones, writing from within a different difference from an uncontested white-affluent norm advocates 'world travelling and loving perception' (1987) as a practice that can afford a way of escaping too-particular, self-contained and, indeed, self-satisfied locations. Donna Haraway (1991) recasts both the subject and the object of knowledge as radically located and unpredictable, conceiving of knowledge-construction as an ongoing process of learning to see, often from positions discredited or marginalized in dominant accounts of knowledge and reality. Pertinent here is Evelyn Fox Keller's (1983) biography of Nobel laureate geneticist Barbara McClintock, where she shows a hitherto marginalized scientist attuned to unexpected differences and anomalies in her objects of study, dwelling with those differences to initiate a major

theoretical breakthrough. Lorraine Code (1991; 1995) examines how power and privilege yield asymmetrically gendered standards of authority in medical knowledge, in the experiences of welfare recipients, in testimonial credibility and in women's responses to sexist and racist challenges. Her ecological model of knowledge and subjectivity (2006) challenges the hegemony of the model of 'mastery' that governs mainstream Anglo-American epistemology. Taking women's cognitive experiences seriously enables feminists, in these diverse ways, to eschew the individualism and universalism of mainstream theory and to examine specifically located knowing, where theory and practice are reciprocally constitutive and knowers are diversely positioned and active within them.

Conceptions of 'margin' and 'centre' have functioned variously in feminist epistemology, from critical analyses of the situations of putative knowers at the centre or at the margins of the social order to the marginalization of women as philosophers and to the marginalization of feminist epistemology within epistemology as such, to name only the most salient variations. These factors may operate separately or in concert, but either way they work to reinforce a cluster of hierarchical divisions and evaluations whose effects are to sustain patriarchal structures of centre and margin within philosophical practices that mirror those within the larger society in the affluent western–northern world.

In a landmark analysis of the politics of marginality in feminist theories of knowledge, Bat-Ami Bar On engages critically with the contention that living on the social–political margins affords epistemic privilege in the sense that 'subjects located at the social margins have an epistemic advantage over those located at the social center' (1993: 85). The central idea, derived from Marxist theory and endorsed in the late 1970s and early 1980s by such socialist feminists as Nancy Hartsock (1983) and Ann Ferguson (1979), is that people who live at a distance from the social–epistemological centre are epistemically

privileged in the sense that, simply in order to survive, they must know the structures and implications of lives at the centre more accurately than those at the situated at the centre have to know their (=marginalized) lives. Thus, for example, workers have to know how to navigate and negotiate the structures and strictures of the social–political order in which they occupy the underclass positions far better and in greater detail than those at the centre need to know their (=the workers') lives. For those at the centre the workers are mere place-holders, cogs in the wheel: the detail of their situations beyond their place in keeping the machinery, both literal and metaphorical, operating smoothly is of no consequence. Yet standpoint epistemologists, as they came to be called, maintained that starting epistemic inquiry from the position of the workers' lives – and subsequently for feminist epistemologists speaking from within patriarchy, starting epistemic inquiry from the standpoint of women's lives – made it possible to see, understand and ultimately unsettle the structures of centre and margin that had been hitherto invisible in 'one-size-fits-all' epistemological inquiry. Hence Hartsock, for example, maintains: '(L)ike the lives of the proletarians according to Marxian theory, women's lives make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy ... which can ground a powerful critique of the phallogocratic institutions and ideology which constitute the capitalist form of patriarchy' (1983: 284). While such claims have not been universally accepted by feminist theorists, they have generated productive debates in the development of a feminist politics of knowledge. Following Marx, Bar On notes the basic idea is that although all knowledge is perspectival, some perspectives 'are more revealing than others ... [especially] the perspectives of [those who] ... are socially marginalized in their relations to dominant groups' (1993: 83). The claim, then, would be that a feminist standpoint gives access to epistemic privilege by virtue of removing the blinkers that inhibit a clear view of the

unnaturalness of the entrenched patriarchal order in knowledge, as elsewhere in gendered social–political–epistemological power–knowledge structures.

These claims are both provocative and contentious in bringing feminist issues into the hitherto putatively neutral domain of epistemology. Noteworthy and in some ways definitive for thinking, now, about standpoint is Alison Wylie's (2003) analysis of 'why standpoint matters', especially in social science. Numerous questions arise, many of which bear on issues of epistemic marginality. Among the most probing is the question of whether standpoint really is a theory, or more properly a methodology. Wylie writes: '[T]o do social science as a standpoint feminist is to approach inquiry from the perspective of insiders rather than impose upon them the external categories of professional social science, a managing bureaucracy, ruling elites' (2003: 27). Here there is no place, and indeed no residual longing, for any idea(l) of a view from nowhere, a god's eye view, as the vantage point from which accurate, neutral vision and hence the best objectivity possible can be achieved, nor can 'the knower' any longer be conceived as a faceless, disembodied place-holder in old and now-tired 'S knows that *p*' formulaic knowledge claims. Taking subjectivity into account becomes a worthy and indeed an urgent practice for feminist epistemologists and moral–political theorists (see Code, 1995).

Noteworthy and initially promising in the 1980s, among attempts to contest the putative neutrality yet tacit masculinity of established conceptions of knowledge worthy of the name, and the consequent invisibility/erasure of female subjectivity and women's experiences, was Belenky et al.'s *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986). In my discussion of the text (Code, 1991) I note its appearance on the epistemological scene as a challenge to established convictions that it is logically possible for every human mind, at least in principle, 'to attain knowledge defined as the ideal product of closely specified reasoning processes'. Yet I also observe that such logical

possibilities 'are of little relevance when practical–political processes ... clearly structure the situations under analysis' (1991: 251). *Women's Ways of Knowing* initially garnered some feminist approval for its careful charting and analyses of women's experiential reports as these had routinely been silenced, marginalized in and indeed excluded from the epistemologies of the mainstream. Ironically, however, the promise of the analysis was truncated in ways that work inadvertently to reproduce women's marginal status even as they endeavour to contest and challenge it. As I have observed, the book 'risks making of experience a tyranny equivalent to the tyranny of the universal, theoretical, and impersonal expertise it seeks to displace' largely in the ways the authors assume that 'autobiographical evidence can be read "straight", unequivocally, without subtexts, hidden agendas, or gaps in the narrative line' (1991: 256). The point is not that women's experiential knowledge claims should not be accorded a fair hearing after all: the purpose of the project was to open spaces for just such a hearing. But overarching assumption of experiential validity refuses to bring those experiences into the kinds of conversation, the debates among putative 'equals', into which experiential claims among colleagues and other interlocutors would ordinarily enter. The idea that no one's experience can be called 'wrong' closes the door on potentially productive discussion: indeed, on the interpretations and debates feminist consciousness-raising practices sought to foster. Such closure counts among the practices a viable standpoint approach aims, I believe, to avoid.

The question remains open, then, as to whether or how speaking and knowing from the social–epistemic margins truly counts as a situation from which epistemic privilege can be claimed. As Bar On rightly notes, 'Both the assumption of a single center from which the epistemically privileged, socially marginalized subjects are distanced and the grounding of their epistemic privilege in their identity and practices are problematic'

(1993: 91). Part of the problem is the presumably guilt-infused view on the part of at least some of ‘the privileged’ that, once those from the margins speak, because they have hitherto been silenced, there is a tacit obligation on the part of the erstwhile silencers to take them at their word, to refrain from critique or challenge. Yet Elizabeth Spelman aptly reminds us that: ‘... white women marginalize women of color as much by the assumption that as women of color they must be right as by the assumption that they must be wrong’ (1988: 182). An analogous assumption restricts the promise of practices that attest to a conviction that ‘granting’ the subaltern a place to speak simultaneously confers a presumption of truth upon her/his every utterance. On such a view she or he remains excluded, if now differently, from full participation in the deliberative spaces where knowledge is made, remade, contested, established, put into circulation.

As I have noted, marginality has many aspects. At the very least, it includes being left out as known or knowable and being left out, side-lined, as a putative knower; being diminished or damaged by/in bodies of knowledge; being denied credibility in testimonial and other epistemic processes and practices; being discredited within a certain hegemonic formula or set of directives for what counts as *bona fide* knowledge. Although these aspects may appear to operate singly in some instances, often they overlap or are interwoven in silencing, ignoring or discrediting certain voices and points of view. In the next section of this essay I endeavour to elaborate these modalities of marginality singly and in some of their intersections.

MULTIPLE MARGINALITIES

Particularly insightful is Rae Langton’s analysis of how ‘when it comes to knowledge’, as she puts it, women get left out, or women get hurt (2000: 129). These are large claims, yet Langton amply illustrates their pervasiveness

in the history of western philosophy, from the writings of Mary Astell in the eighteenth century through to such twentieth-century philosophers and theorists as Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan and Marilyn Frye. Being left out in this respect involves more than a simple (or not so simple) failure to take note of women’s contributions to the philosophical canon: it also, and frequently, involves figuring women as unknowable, mysterious, enigmatic and, hence, located ‘beyond the pale’ of who or what needs to be, or is worthy of being, known, addressed, taken into account. Notable is Beauvoir’s caustic reference in *The Second Sex* to the ‘myth’ of feminine ‘mystery’, whose pervasiveness enables a man who ‘does not “understand” a woman ... instead of admitting his ignorance’ to recognize ‘a mystery exterior to himself’, thus allowing him ‘an excuse that flatters his laziness and vanity at the same time’, offering what, for many men, is ‘a more attractive experience than an authentic relation with a human being’ (2009: 268–9). Variations on such exclusions and ignorings are well documented. Throughout the so-called ‘second wave’, from Genevieve Lloyd’s detailed mappings in *The Man of Reason* (1993) of how ideals of reason and of masculinity have mirrored one another in their historical evolution and consistently defined themselves by exclusion of ‘the feminine’, feminist philosophers have, variously, chronicled women’s absence/exclusion from or denigration within the panoply of reason, rationality and knowledgability. Peculiarly significant, in this regard, has been women’s lack of knowledge of their ‘own lives and experiences as women’ (Langton, 2000: 131). From Betty Friedan’s (1963) reference to ‘the problem that has no name’ to Nancy Tuana’s (2006) analysis of the significance of epistemologies of ignorance for the women’s health movement, startling lacunae have been exposed in women’s knowledge about their lives, bodies, selves and subjectivities: lacunae famously addressed in 1973 in the politically remarkable publication by the Boston Women’s Health Collective of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*

(*OBOS*), since republished numerous times, with 'A New Edition for a New Era' appearing in 2005 (see Davis 2007).

According to Tuana, a major task facing women's health activists is still that of showing how women's bodies were ignored and/or their health issues misrepresented, partly in consequence of sedimented androcentric or sexist beliefs about female sexuality, reproductive health issues and/or responsibility for contraception, many of which persist even after *OBOS*. When women are constructed as 'objects of knowledge not as authorized knowers' (2006: 9) the situation is not significantly better, epistemologically, than it is in the passage from *The Second Sex* Langton cites. Here issues of women being left out and women being hurt overlap and reinforce one another: either way, a mode of marginalization is being enacted. Ignorance, as Tuana reminds us, is often constructed, maintained and disseminated. It is linked to issues of cognitive authority, doubt, trust, silencing and uncertainty. But Langton's overarching point also needs to be underscored: 'Women may fail to be counted as knowers ... because of a spurious universality ascribed to a merely partial story of the world as told by men ...' (2000: 132–3). These sins of omission, as Langton calls them, translate or evolve readily into sins of commission, especially when it becomes apparent that traditional 'norms of knowledge' that leave women out can also have the effect of objectifying women simply by assuming that whatever needs to be known about them can be known without their participation or input, or can be derived without remainder from knowledge about or made by men. In this regard, Langton draws the reader's attention to circumstances in which the world can be said to 'arrange itself' to fit what the powerful believe – as, for example, in situations where 'believing women to be subordinate can make women subordinate: thinking so can make it so, when it is backed up by power' (2000: 139). Beauvoir's phenomenological analysis of what we might call the 'making' of woman into/as the second sex is

an elaborated case in point: 'She is determined and differentiated in relation to man ... she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other' (2009: 6). And, in a similar vein, Langton aptly cites Marilyn Frye's powerful image of 'the arrogant eye', where, as she puts it:

the arrogant perceiver ... coerces the objects of his perception into satisfying the conditions his perception imposes. ... How one sees another and how one expects the other to perceive are in tight interdependence, and how one expects the other to behave is a large factor in determining how the other does behave. (Frye, 1983: 67)

Such patterns of conformity to the expectations of the powerful, even when these are not strictly codified or enforced, are apparent throughout the social structures of patriarchal, white, class-based and other power–privilege differentiated societies and social groups, from the family to the wider society. Women, blacks, other non-white persons, children, slaves and servants are enjoined to 'know their place' and to occupy that place as befits one variously subject to the expectations and limitations that infuse the social–political imaginary of a given society or segment thereof. Failing to do so routinely invites censure, or worse. Yet when their place is defined and monitored by others, knowing their place can hurt and diminish women and Others (from the white male norm), truncating their potential for achieving well-realized lives.

The imperative to 'know one's place' operates unevenly and with multiple degrees of hurting and discrediting across western/northern societies. So far, and presumptively, I have referred to 'women' generically in ways that fail to capture the complexity and indeed the epistemic injustice involved in adducing such a unified category. It may indeed be true that women 'as such' are hurt, diminished, left out in the epistemologies of the Anglo-American mainstream and in the knowledge produced under their aegis, but the identity 'woman' is never uninflected: poor women, black women,

old women, Hispanic women, uneducated women, highly educated women, indigenous women, eminent women, to name just the smallest sampling, are hurt and left out differently, required to 'know their place' differently across all known social orders. These so-called 'identities' rarely come singly: they intersect and function in complex intersectional ways across every society however large or small, where the term 'intersectionality' derives from a metaphor coined in the late 1980s by US critical legal theorist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw to explain how race oppression and gender oppression interact in black women's lives (see Crenshaw, 1991). More recently, theorists have expanded and elaborated the term to capture a greater range of the multiple aspects of 'identity' that may operate in diverse social-political-epistemological situations (see, for example, Bailey, 2010; Garry, 2012).

Some or all of these differences will undoubtedly be salient in all of the many situations where women are hurt, discredited, left out, ignored in knowledge and in their knowing practices. Here I will start with one particularly urgent example which brings together questions about knowing, testimony and epistemic agency that cut generically across the category 'woman' and specifically across diverse, intersecting groups of women. The issue is the testimony of female rape victims, which has notoriously and routinely been discounted and discredited universally, but is more viciously and egregiously discounted across certain targeted groups of women, who are exceptionally vulnerable to incredulity, indeed of the crassest kind. All of these practices reflect profoundly sexist assumptions: that rape happens only to sexually 'pure' or 'virtuous' women or that it matters only when it happens to them; that women are likely to lie about having been raped; that women who are raped 'have asked for it'. Demeaning references to a woman's appearance, attire, status, location, sexual history or relationship to the alleged rapist may be cited as evidence of consent, of 'asking for it'. Moreover, in the USA black

women's 'unrapeability' was written into law in a racial ideology that defined them as naturally lascivious and promiscuous; and portrayals of women in pornographic and mainstream media as enjoying, and therefore consenting to, forceful, violent sex reinforces these stereotypical assumptions and tells against according women's testimony the credibility it otherwise merits. Ann Cahill rightly observes: 'rape must be understood fundamentally ... as an affront to the embodied subject ... a sexually specific act that destroys (if only temporarily) the intersubjective, embodied agency and therefore personhood of a woman' (2001: 13). In my view, such a victim's *epistemic* subjectivity and agency is likewise fundamentally destroyed: an extreme form of marginalization in its erasure of a woman's capacity to know her 'own' experiences. (Germane is Wittgenstein's remark: 'If I were contradicted on all sides and told that this person's name is not what I had always known it was (and I use 'know' here intentionally), then in that case the foundation of all judging would be taken away from me' (1969: §614).)

Patterns of incredulity are widespread across social-epistemological exchanges and events: they are especially intransigent blocks to credibility and to claiming epistemic status in the rhetorical spaces of any society. In their intransigence they install and enforce marginal status, and are exceptionally difficult to dislodge. Thus, for example, in *Ecological Thinking* (Code, 2006) I read Rachel Carson's epistemological-scientific practice to show how she, as a knower who did not fit easily within the received scientific orthodoxy of her day, was and continues to be marginalized, discredited within 'normal science' for aspects of her life and work that were open to criticism as variously 'irregular'. That she had no PhD and no accredited academic position clearly counted against her, as did her practice of drawing just as respectfully on testimonial reports from lay people about ecological damage as she drew on reports of laboratory findings. Admittedly, Carson lived and worked at a time and in an epistemic

climate where (prior to the advent of social epistemology) testimony as such counted as a lowly and unreliable source of knowledge by contrast with the putatively greater certainty-achieving perception and memory favoured in empiricist orthodoxy. Many scholars now applaud the place she accords to lay testimony in documenting damaging practices. In her time, Carson was rarely discredited because she was a woman, although subsequent scholars have shown that such forms of denigration hovered just beneath the surface in evaluations of her life and work (Lytle, 2007; Sideris and Moore, 2008; Oreskes and Conway, 2010; Code, 2012a). But the larger point is to confirm what can reasonably be called the methodological tyranny of a scientific orthodoxy that discounts valuable and indeed life-enhancing knowledge claims that have not been derived in purified laboratory conditions. Biologist Karen Messing, whose work I also discuss in *Ecological Thinking*, documents a politics of knowledge and exclusion wherein women's experiential reports of workplace illness, suffering and long-term damage are routinely discounted as anecdotally unreliable by contrast with statistical analyses in which, because of their rarity and idiosyncrasy, the symptoms such women report often fail to register (Messing, 1998). Too briefly summarized, these examples tell of kinds of knowing that are readily sidelined, marginalized in analyses where they simply (or not so simply) fail to fit within an uncontested set of assumptions about how valid knowledge will look. It is by no means fanciful to suppose that some of Messing's subjects were not taken seriously because they were women: many were poor, uneducated, working in jobs that carried little prestige or status and thus, in view of the intellectual climate of the time and place, minimal presumptions of testimonial credibility.

THE POLITICS OF TESTIMONY

Testimony as such, on which both Carson and Messing rely, occupies an unstable and

uneven place in the epistemologies of the mainstream well beyond its egregious discrediting in the politics of rape. That unevenness is exacerbated in places and circumstances where the putative 'knower' can, for a range of personal and situational reasons, be discounted because of who he or she is. Emblematic in this regard is black feminist legal theorist Patricia Williams's response to the incredulity she encountered in response to her attempt to publish an account of a blatantly racist incident at a Benetton's shop in New York City: 'I could not but wonder ... what it would take to make my experience verifiable. The testimony of an independent white bystander? ... The blind application of principles of neutrality ... acted either to make me look crazy or to make the reader participate in old habits of cultural bias' (1991: 47, 48). There can, I suggest, be no contest to the claim that being treated as crazy or viewed through lenses tainted with persistent cultural bias count as forms of blatant social-epistemic marginalization. The incident is continuous with a well-known history of testimonial marginalization in which, in the western world, only men counted as bona fide testifiers and at least in the southern USA blacks could not testify at all, in the sense that their testimony could not claim acknowledgement as evidence. I mention these facts not to ignore or discount the significance of 'taking subjectivity into account' in evaluating testimonial evidence, but to show how recognitions of subjectivity can be misused, can be turned into damaging '*ad feminam*' dismissals and discrediting of a woman's testimony on the basis of her female identity alone. Analogous claims of a black or Hispanic, unemployed or too-old person's evidence (to name just a few of the options) can readily be cited and invoked to justify or excuse acts of epistemic marginalization.

Such practices have acquired a new vocabulary and claimed new rhetorical spaces in consequence of Miranda Fricker's innovative work in introducing into circulation the discourse of epistemic injustice

(Fricker, 2007). The conceptual apparatus Fricker articulates and others have elaborated puts in place new resources for addressing practices of epistemic marginalization as they are enacted in gendered, raced or classed social spaces. Among other examples, Fricker details practices of discounting the testimony of a black witness in a courtroom, of concealment consequent upon the homophobia of a society where a young homosexual man is deterred from acknowledging his nascent sexuality, of perhaps inadvertent silencing when women cannot name behaviours that violate their personal, physical space prior to the conceptual breakthrough effected by inventing the language of sexual harassment.

Traditional adherents to epistemological orthodoxy who were sceptical about testimony from the outset will undoubtedly contend that such unresolvables are inevitable once testimony, with its subject-specific uncertainties, is accorded a respectable place in epistemic inquiry. But feminist and other social-political epistemologists welcome this new focus which, in effect, promises to relocate epistemology down on the ground, in the world, with its inevitable variations, instabilities and diversity. It opens the way to moving subjectivity and questions of credibility, responsibility and trust onto the epistemic terrain. Testimony will, inevitably, be someone's testimony, and will vary qualitatively (as well, perhaps, as quantitatively) according to who that knower is/those knowers are; to how well she, he or they adhere to principles of responsible epistemic inquiry which, variously, go beyond straightforward truth-telling, accuracy, to ensure that the knowledge conveyed is good of its kind (see Code, 1987). None of these admittedly vague requirements can be spelled out in a checklist of rules to be followed and errors to be avoided, but thinking about epistemic responsibility moves close to the realm of virtue epistemology where, indeed, no hard and fast rules are to be found, but where virtues are social attributes realizable by emulation and aspiration in social deliberative practices where the idea of epistemological

individualism recedes from centre stage and knowledge-construction becomes a communal, interpretive and deliberative practice. Developing practices of epistemic responsibility and trust involves moving away from a spectator epistemology to situations where speakers and hearers make, deliberate, take up or contest attempts to know as well as possible within and across situations and populations where knowing takes place. Shifting from a perceptual, top-down model of knowing to a horizontal model of knowledge-making as a communal activity requires rethinking some of the dominant assumptions of Anglo-American epistemology, especially those about the interchangeability of knowers, situations and subject matters. It opens the way to tacit or explicit reconsiderations of centrality and marginality: the issues that concern me here.

Although the language of margin and centre has been the point of entry for some of the issues I have been discussing, especially in its indebtedness to the title of bell hooks's landmark text *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), it is worth reconsidering whether so seemingly linear a formula as the one about the superiority of and the epistemic privilege attached to knowledge from the margins can make sense, without merely replicating or reversing older hierarchical structures. It is with such cautionary thoughts in mind that I turn to revisiting these thoughts about 'the centre', thinking that while there can be little doubt about the centrality claimed for and occupied by white western affluent masculine lives and the knowledge made there, it also needs to be acknowledged that, of the many margins surrounding and excluded by this multifaceted – indeed, oddly shaped – centre, not all are equivalently privileged epistemically, if they are privileged at all; nor are knowers who are indeed commonly privileged by a single distancing-decentering aspect of their 'identity'. In short, it is important to contest the tacit assumption in western societies that there is only one 'centre', since it is clearly apparent that there are multiple forms of marginalization and

oppression that intersect variously and are variously distant from and occluded by the concerns of ‘the centre’.

Given the radical shifts in global politics during the first decades of the twenty-first century, with their exposure of global ignorance, and given the innovatively unsettling developments in feminist theory and practice, the very idea of ‘the centre’ is increasingly troubling, to the point where a new beginning seems to be in order. Such a beginning might be something akin to a quasi-Cartesian radical doubting, a phenomenological bracketing, or what Charles Mills calls ‘an operation of Brechtian defamiliarization, estrangement, on [y]our cognition’ (2005: 169). Mills’s recommendation derives from his distrust of ‘ideal ethical theory’ and the dislocated presuppositions on which it rests, but such a project has as much to recommend it with regard to ideal epistemological theory, in itself and in its uneasy relationship with the ethics and politics of knowledge. The thought is not new to feminist epistemologists, but taking it seriously involves recognizing that a significant component of responsible epistemic agency, now, across a range of issues, is for ‘us’ to come to *know*, responsibly and in its existential–ecological detail, the extent of ‘our’ ignorance. Such ‘estrangement’ – such acknowledgement of ignorance – need not paralyse inquiry. In response to the challenge early naysayers posed to Genevieve Lloyd’s *The Man of Reason*, asking her what she proposed putting in the place of Reason, she observed that it had taken so long to understand the changing historical inter-mappings of reason and masculinity that it would be facile, irresponsible, to offer up a new construct, at once, to take their place. Yet, equipped with the understandings her analysis made available, feminist and other post-colonial philosophy has proceeded with new, provocatively cautionary assessments of its own local character. An analogous situation could evolve from the kind of estrangement Mills proposes, as is evidenced more dramatically in the myriad debates generated out of his pathbreaking publication of *The*

Racial Contract (1998), which has been inspirational in generating creatively innovative feminist and post-colonial work in the new ‘epistemologies of ignorance’ (Sullivan and Tuana, 2007).

An ‘estrangement’ or bracketing project, in my view, amounts, provocatively, to a plea for ignorance: indeed, to an acknowledgement of the need to *know our ignorance* so as to engage well with some of the most urgent conundrums of our time. It could not be addressed in disingenuous disavowals analogous to those white western women, historically, were trained to utter in deference to the superior cognitive powers of the white men of their time and station. Yet it points toward ways of counteracting the arrogance of white western perceptions (thinking of Marilyn Frye, 1983) while proceeding, if the lesson is well learned, with a renewed, but not deferential, humility. (As an aside, it is worth noting that humility is an intellectual virtue often attributed to Rachel Carson.) It is about acknowledging and countering white ignorance but, following Alison Bailey (2007: 81–2), not only about knowing and deploring injustices done but about learning – in her words – from ‘strategic uses of ignorance by people of color’, which is achievable, she maintains, not by moving out from the local with its presuppositions and its logic intact but ‘by learning to think in new logics ... developing (following Maria Lugones) an account of subjectivity that centers on multiplicity’, which turns away from the abstract individual of classical liberal ethics and epistemology, and the punctiform, monological propositional knowledge claim.

Epistemologically, certain narratives evince a capacity to map knowledge-enhancing and knowledge-impeding structures and forces, structures of ignorance and knowing, to derive normative conclusions that – deliberately, negotiably – translate from region to region, not without remainder, but as instructively in the disanalogies they expose as in the analogies they propose. In my essay ‘They Treated Him Well’ (Code, 2012b) I take as

exemplary of an ordinary ignorance that fails to see itself for what it is the situation of a woman named Maureen, the hitherto affluent white South African protagonist of Nadine Gordimer's novel *July's People*. She, in her everyday life, takes universal human sameness for granted: sameness of relationships and feelings, of conjugal arrangements and gendered divisions of labour, of the significance of places and objects. She persists in these assumptions even when she is uprooted from her affluent life to the village of her black African servant, July, and does so despite her avowed commitment to acquiring a sense of how it is for him and the people of his village, where he has provided refuge for her and her family from racial riots in the city. For her, Gordimer writes, 'The human creed depended on validities staked on a belief in the absolute nature of intimate relationships between human beings. If people don't all experience emotional satisfaction and deprivation in the same way, what claim can there be for equality of need?' she wonders (Gordimer, 1981: 64). Even when she is removed from the taken-for-granted certainties of her then-time life she cannot recognize the specificity of her conceptions of sexual loyalty, 'suburban adultery' and love to the white middle-class society where she learned them; cannot wonder self-critically whether these apparently universal verities might not count as universal after all. Such a move is beyond the scope of her imagining. My aim in reading the novel is, in part, to show how little this white woman is able to realize of the sheer *local* character of the local, even in human intimacy: how ill-placed and ill-advised she is to make of that 'local' a touchstone from which to imagine the world from his position, for July, her erstwhile black servant, her 'boy'. (Bailey notes 'Ignorance flourishes when we confine our movements, thoughts, and actions to those worlds, social circles, and logics where we are most comfortable' (2007: 90)). A quasi-Cartesian bracketing might have served this woman well: had she been able to realize how narrow the range of the local

was, she might have been better able to see the presumptuousness of merely stretching its scope and terms of reference to explain the less local, the hitherto more remote, now right before her eyes. She fails to understand the value of engaging with July and with 'his place', of constructing a narrative that would enable her to know how it is for him and his people. That failure to move away from the tenacity of life at 'the centre' is ultimately her undoing.

MARGINALIZATION WITHIN

So far I have been discussing centrality and marginality as they are internally operative in cognitive practices within the feminist epistemologies of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. But it is crucial, too, to turn our attention to a quasi-meta-epistemological issue that is also of notable concern: the marginalization of feminist epistemology as such, within the epistemologies of the mainstream. For many feminists and other post-colonial theorists, epistemology is not a self-contained philosophical pursuit engaged in for the sake of resolving perennial intellectual puzzles. Indeed, Heidi Grasswick (2012b) rightly observes that many feminist social epistemologists are committed to establishing connections between knowledge-producing practices and democratic social-political social orders. For my purposes here, one of the most telling implications of such a commitment would be in its (learned) capacity for addressing and countering some of the modalities of marginality I have articulated, with the injustices they produce. Such overarching goals do not dispute the more narrowly epistemological principle that knowledge pursuits have to be evaluated for their empirical-historical-situational adequacy, although they do contest the narrowness with which 'adequacy' has often been conceived. Thoughts such as these prompt my contention in *Ecological Thinking* that 'thinking ecologically carries with it a large measure of responsibility – to know

somehow more *carefully* than single surface readings can allow ... ecological thinking is about imagining, crafting, articulating, endeavouring to enact principles of ideal cohabitation' in epistemic and moral-political deliberation (Code, 2006: 24). Crucial here is the challenge such an exhortation presents to traditional divisions between ethics, politics and epistemology. Many feminist analyses of the social implications of knowing suggest that there are choices to be made in matters of knowledge-production that go beyond simple verification or falsification of *S* knows that *p* claims (and sometimes even there). Eschewing epistemic individualism opens inquiry into larger and arguably more complex questions about credibility, testimony, ignorance and trust where decisions have to be made that are responsible to the subject matters under investigation – be they animate or inanimate – and responsive to the specificities and larger commonalities between and among knowers and known. None of this is easy, but all of it is richly promising and seriously challenging. Such thoughts underscore the imperative of 'taking subjectivity into account' I have referred to earlier: knowing people well, whether singly or in groups, requires knowing them at least in some aspects of their specificity, their distinctness from and their commonalities with others; their circumstances of privilege and/or oppression: knowing what matters to them, the detail of their 'situations'. Epistemologically, once testimony moves onto the epistemic terrain as a recognized source of knowledge, aspects of subjectivity – testifiers' trustworthiness, their credibility, reliability – come to play a part in how their testimony is received, evaluated, acted upon. Such factors pertain variously in specialized scientific and social scientific inquiry, and variously again in a range of everyday circumstances from quotidian to legal to medical exchanges of knowledge and information, and beyond. For feminist epistemology, with its commitment to fostering deliberative democratic knowledge exchanges, it matters to nurture inclusive knowledge-making and respectful

critical-contestatory practices. Hence, for example, when Elizabeth Anderson proposes that justice and equality of respect are crucial for realizing the goals of higher education, in an article entitled 'The Democratic University: The Role of Justice in the Production of Knowledge' (1995), I am proposing that the title can and indeed ought to be read two ways, where the second reading would be 'the role of knowledge in the production of justice', thereby signalling the multiply entangled nature of these issues and the difficulty of determining which of these requirements is fundamental. The inquiry feminist epistemologists are engaged in has to go both ways.

These thoughts refer back to the quasi-meta-epistemological issue I have mentioned. In a sobering and wholly persuasive diagnosis of 'the marginalization of feminist epistemology' Phyllis Rooney observes that, in the eyes of mainstream epistemologists, the conviction persists that feminist epistemology is not epistemology 'proper' (2012: 3). Startling within the body of significant evidence she adduces in support of this claim is the observation that critics of feminist epistemology commonly develop their critiques without adhering to the norms of research, reading and reasoning they would bring to bear on critiques of positions and subject matters they were prepared to take more seriously. Rooney's apt observation conjures up a reversal of Spelman's contention about marginalizing a woman of color by assuming she must be right (cf. *supra*, p. 11): clearly, from such a dismissive point of view feminist epistemology has no claim even to be taken seriously enough to demonstrate why or how it must be wrong. To suggest that this issue is meta-epistemological has a certain plausibility, for the marginalization of feminist epistemology seems to derive from some intransigent assumptions about the 'nature' of epistemology as such, so to speak, in standing above and remaining impervious to issues of human specificity and/or embodiment in an ongoing if tacit commitment to the goal of determining

necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence of knowledge ‘as such’. The very attribute ‘feminist’ vitiates the project. But this issue is also, and equally significantly, ‘sub-epistemological’ in a perhaps curious sense, for the very act of ignoring the claims of feminist epistemology to occupy a position on the epistemic terrain seems to rely on certain antiquated and sedimented subterranean convictions about the very possibility of there being, in women (here generically conceived), a capacity for reason, rationality, judgement, objectivity, clarity, discrimination, intellectual authority. Hence Rooney notes that feminist work in epistemology ‘is still regularly framed as an attack or “assault” on reason and objectivity, as something hostile to the very ground of epistemology “proper”’ (2012: 12): a point Carla Fehr underscores in her subtle analysis of diversity in epistemic communities, where she offers impressive arguments in support of her contention that, for women, ‘uptake and equality of intellectual authority prove to be particularly challenging criteria to meet’ (2012: 135). Women, Fehr notes, tend still to be ‘in marginal positions within the academy’ (2012: 151) now, more than three decades since questions about the sex of the knower were first articulated.

Rooney returns to the question of marginality and epistemic privilege with which we began, to contend that ‘being on the margins is not all bad – especially when one has good company there!’ (2012: 14); and she allows that there may indeed be some advantages to this location. Cautioning against the implausibility of claiming that epistemic privilege automatically follows from or counts as an adjunct benefit of marginality, she nonetheless observes ‘the lived experience of marginalization can enable one to see and understand things that are quite ‘invisible’ to those not marginalized’ (2012: 14), here referring again to Patricia Hill Collins’s claims for the value of the ‘doubled consciousness’ available to the ‘outsider within’ with the creative tensions it generates (2012: 14). It would be a mistake to revalue marginality with a ‘sour

grapes’ argument to the effect that the inside is so uncomfortable that no woman would want to be there anyway. But it is important not to undervalue what women – many women, of multiply intersecting colours, races, classes, capacities, nationalities and other Otherings – have achieved in their/our excluded situations.

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Natural Others? On Nature, Culture and Knowledge

Astrida Neimanis

What is the relation between nature and culture? How does the political grammar of these terms inform the concerns of feminist theory – namely sexual difference, gender oppression and its connections with racism, heteronormativity, coloniality and other marginalizations? And how might the nature/culture relation be relevant for feminist knowledge projects? Sherry Ortner's essay 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?' (1972) benchmarks a lively and ongoing debate within anthropological scholarship about the limits of an affirmative answer to her question (for example, MacCormack and Strathern, 1980; Moore, 1994; Franklin, 2003). Beyond serving as a touchstone for feminist anthropology, the nature/culture debate has also proliferated throughout many strands and schools of feminist thought, arguably constituting a foundational question for feminism more generally.

Charting 'the' genealogy of the nature/culture question within feminism would be impossible: there are many paths along which to trace this debate, and any narrative

of progress would also be one of gathering, subversion, repetition, interruption and anachronism (see Colebrook, 2009; Hemmings, 2011; Bianchi, 2012; Chidgey, 2012). No linear tale will do. The objective of this chapter is instead to interrogate how 'nature' and the 'natural' have been interpreted within feminist theory – as an innate givenness, as a naturalization of what is acceptable, but also as the ecological (and sometimes biological) milieu of the more-than-human. As we shall see, there is no necessary agreement among feminists about what the 'natural' means, or about how such a term might relate to feminist objectives. More specifically, this chapter explores how taking environmental concerns and non-human others into account can intersect with, challenge and expand feminist theory and the ethics and politics it champions. In its (provisional) schematization of various feminist positions, this chapter also provides a more detailed evaluation of 'new materialist' positions on nature/culture. It concludes by sketching some of the epistemological implications of

rethinking nature, culture and their relation in a new materialist vein.

NATURE/CULTURE AND THE 'MASTER MODEL'

The nature/culture dichotomy is a pervasive and enduring aspect of how the world is conceptually organised within 'our European thought system' (MacCormack, 1980: 8). This bifurcation of nature/culture provides the basis for what feminist theorist Val Plumwood calls the 'master' identity or model, whereby the interconnected whole of life is structured and understood instead according to atomistic, dualized pairs (Plumwood, 1993). Within this conceptual framework, not only are 'nature' and 'culture' defined in opposition but other terms such as 'female' and 'male' are understood according to the same oppositional logic – where culture stands in for (active) masculinity and nature for (passive) femininity. This western apparatus is also fraught by racism and coloniality. Culture is primarily aligned with western, cosmopolitan ways of life, while notions of (unspoiled/unformed) Nature and (innocent/primitive) indigeneity are conflated (Strang, 2005; see also Smith, 2005a: 55–78). These conceptual linkages expand to include other pairs as well: mind/body; reason/emotion, production/reproduction and so on, where one side becomes valorized, and the other denigrated.¹

Even as a pervasive worldview in the west, this gendered and racialized bifurcation of nature/culture cannot account for all individual or community values and actions toward nature and those associated therewith, and, as noted below, this value system is hardly universal.² Worldviews are neither static nor impervious, and can change over time. It would be difficult to argue that, today, all women and racialized groups are imprisoned by an association with nature. At the same time, a worldview or conceptual framework establishes a norm that guides orientations toward the real – and, perhaps

even more significantly, can serve as a fall-back position, particularly where the hegemonic social order is challenged. A worldview is thus not 'just' a conceptual apparatus. In the case of the nature/culture bifurcation, the effects extend beyond the theoretical establishment of chains of meaning to guide normative beliefs and behaviours towards those human and more-than-human bodies situated 'on the wrong side' of this framework. Plumwood's work, for example, underlines how this dualistic way of imagining the world leads to at least five concrete orientations towards 'natural others'. These include backgrounding (a 'forgetting' of that which is the condition of possibility of the privileged term – for example, failing to account for the reproductive labour upon which productive labour depends); radical exclusion (positing the chasm between the two sides as absolute – as in the humanist error that does not readily count humans among 'animals'); incorporation (defining the other in terms of and in relation to the self – such as colonial views of the 'noble savage' who 'completes' civilized Man as a foil); instrumentalism (valuing the other only as a resource that can benefit the privileged term – such as valuing a river only for its capacity to produce hydroelectric power for humans); and stereotyping (essentializing so as to deny variation within each pole, or beyond them – as in an exclusive gender binary) (Plumwood, 1993: Ch. 2; see also Gaard, 2001: 159).³ Where valued at all, the denigrated side is never valued for its intrinsic worth.

As a result of these orientations, power is concentrated at the 'intersection of privilege in terms of race/class/gender/species/sexuality' (Gaard, 2001: 158). This way of engaging the world has specific discursive and material effects on all sides, but notably on those deemed 'natural others'. Disparities in economic and health indicators between indigenous and settler populations in colonial nation states, a persistent gender pay gap and devaluation of care work, and the ongoing privatization and commodification of natural resources for the profit of privileged elites

are a few basic examples of these consequences. This conceptual apparatus thus strongly bears upon many feminist projects of liberation and transformation and the theories that support these projects. But what exactly is meant by the concept of 'natural others'? Who or what does it designate?

Importantly, the idea of 'natural others' has multiple, overlapping and mutually reinforcing senses. In the first place, 'natural others' brings to mind the historical truism in the West that the subordination of women, people of colour, indigenous people and other marginalized peoples was viewed as entirely 'natural' – meaning commonplace and acceptable by virtue of 'commonsense' agreement. The closely related and overlapping second meaning of the 'natural' implies that the 'otherness' of others – be those women or other deviations from the white, straight, able-bodied western standard of subjectivity – stems from those others' own 'nature'. Whatever denigrated qualities they might possess are simply 'the way they are'. 'Natural' in this second sense is a synonym for innate, inherent or intrinsic, where such qualities are again assumed to be immutable.

'Natural' in both of these senses is closely linked to the concept of naturalization – a process whereby the givenness of certain qualities or associations becomes accepted as innately true, and the mutable premises upon which such a 'given' has been established are hidden from view. Because oppositional dualisms are manifest both politically and psychologically, 'naturalness' in both of these senses is integrated into psychic structures and resists critical scrutiny. Importantly for feminists, one of the most significant ways in which gender differences have acquired a social meaning has been in the naming of the 'natural'. This is demonstrated in the allocation of tasks, responsibilities, forms of work and public participation justified by the 'naturally' passive or emotional characters of women or the 'naturally' intelligent and leadership-oriented characters of men. Claims that the logics of global capitalism and the market economy 'naturally' befit

humans – that it is 'natural' for people to want to work for themselves, and so forth⁴ – similarly naturalize both personal traits and political and economic orders as either innate or commonsensical. This blinkers public appreciation of the social injustices that accompany these viewpoints and systems, while also depoliticizing and dismissing protest or dissent. Such naturalization describes the 'tenacious "natural order"' of things' to which feminist epistemologist Lorraine Code refers in recalling the entrenched pre-1960s power structures that were at once antifeminist, racist, imperialist and militarist (Code, 2006: 15), and which persist in various guises today. Many feminist theoretical and political interventions have been spurred by the desire to resist such naturalization and to challenge this deployment of the 'natural' that has acted as a major force for social differentiation, often in a negative sense.⁵

In these first two senses, then, nature/natural refers to that which is acceptable or which cannot be altered. Both meanings reinforce the power of the other. But Code also explicitly identifies a third meaning of nature/natural in this 'natural order of things': natural is a referent for what we call the environment or the (non-human) natural world. Here, nature is aligned with that which is othered (subordinated, oppressed) in relation to a not only colonial or masculinist but also distinctly *human* norm. In Code's 'natural order' and Plumwood's 'master model', racism, sexism and coloniality are intricately bound up with anthropocentric environmental disregard. In its third meaning, then, natural becomes synonymous with the presumably brute matter and non-human life that populates our 'environment'. Drawing on the Western Enlightenment mind/body dualism that also informs the master model, the third sense of 'nature' moreover includes the biological substrata – visceral life, organic life, molecular life and so forth. Not only is nature *non-human* or *more-than-human*, but it is also *less-than-human* (even when literally enclosed *within* the human). Taking this third sense in the light of the first two, we see

that 'nature' becomes ensnared in a circular logic: 'nature' is denigrated because its own 'nature' (essential way of being) is 'naturally' (commonly accepted as) subordinate; there is no room here to define 'nature' in any other way. Caught in such a trap, nature draws all of its associated terms into the same snare of subordination.

The maddening slippage between these three understandings of 'natural' is crucial for keeping in place the hegemony of binary thinking. A chain of meaning is enacted whereby enough reinforcements are ready at hand to maintain the othering effects of this model, even when a single term, meaning or association does not quite fall in line with its logic. The master model is flexible in this way. Rather than a rigorous inquiry into the meaning and content of any one term, the implicated terms of one side of the binary come to stand in as attributes for any other term: 'woman' or 'indigenous' comes to mean irrational, primitive, body, emotion and so on, just as 'body' or 'emotion' equally comes to mean woman, nature, physicality or other denigrated attributes. The only scope for difference is an exclusive opposite. Each side of the master model's binary represents a persistent and convoluted tautological gymnastics: nature is naturally inferior because it is natural, and woman is inferior because she is natural, and the natural is inferior because it is feminine, which is inferior, which is natural ... and so on.⁶ While frustratingly circular, this *modus operandi* also underlines one of the most pressing challenges for feminist theory in these debates: the need to be clear about what exactly we mean by 'nature' and the 'natural'. Interrupting this chain of meaning requires exposing the errors upon which it is based. As we shall see, there is no necessary agreement among feminists about what the 'natural' refers to, or which 'errors' in these meaning-chains require exposure or correction.

As noted above, the master model logic is rooted in a western cosmology (e.g. MacCormack, 1980; Moore, 1988; 1994). To naturalize and dehistoricize this worldview

as universal is indeed problematic. At the same time, the global survival of western coloniality – in cultural, economic and geopolitical terms – means that the effects of this conceptual bifurcation demand ongoing interrogation not limited to western contexts.⁷ A western conceptual framework becomes part of the project of colonization, determining value and even what counts as 'real' (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999: 42–57). If we take seriously the master model's chains of mutually reinforcing denigrations (of women, colonized people, non-human animals and other 'natural others'), then any feminist theory would seem incomplete without (at the very least) an acknowledgement of its connection to these other marginalizations. In its recognition of the inseparability of multiple axes of oppressions, a master model analysis shares elements with feminist theories of intersectionality (see Crenshaw, 1991). Plumwood's critique identifies the values and behaviours of this model as 'stemming not from a single system such as patriarchy, capitalism, or anthropocentrism – as suggested by the analyses of radical feminism, Marxism, and deep ecology, respectively – but from a system of interlocking, oppressive structures' that are central to western culture (Gaard, 2001: 158). We might also ask what oppressions or marginalizations are unwittingly shored up by feminist theories that do not adequately account for these connections. The work of black feminisms, anti-colonial feminisms and queer feminisms to expand feminist theory beyond a neutralized, narrow vision of 'woman' has been crucial for its continued flourishing and its related ethico-political objectives. Feminist theory has thus taken important strides to address the natural *human* others of the white, straight, western master identity.⁸

At the same time, the species-based privilege of anthropocentrism as one of the master model's axes of oppression is yet to be widely accepted as an intrinsic feminist concern. Why not? Feminism, it seems, in the most universal sense it can muster, is about gendered human bodies. Ongoing and crucial

debates about what feminism is and who it is for (including which women are excluded from feminism's purview, who counts as woman, and the place of men and transgender people in these discussions) all point to a human person with some claim to some gender at their pivot. Questions of coloniality, race, class, sexuality, ability, age and other intersectional axes can all be discussed as facets of feminist concern, and their relative importance, precedence, compatibility, overlap and inextricability in relation to the category 'woman' can all be debated. When we move to the plane of the non-human or more-than-human nature, however, a different sort of conceptual leap is required; the Venn diagram of feminist intersectionality needs another dimension. How, then, should questions about our non-human 'natural others' be included within feminist theories?

The normative claim of this chapter is that feminism should be concerned with anthropocentrism. Earlier ecofeminists such as Plumwood (1993) and Ynestra King (e.g. 1989) argued for the place of environmental degradation alongside other feminist concerns. More recently, Claire Colebrook has made a similar observation, but not from an explicitly ecofeminist perspective. Given feminism's committed exploration of otherness in general, Colebrook notes, an extension of this to the non-human would be 'neither an addition nor supplement' but 'the unfolding of the women's movement's proper potentiality'. At the same time, 'feminists' criticisms of man would not be add-ons to environmentalism but would be crucial to any reconfiguration of ecological thinking' (Colebrook, 2012: 72).

If the anthropocentrism of feminism is to be acknowledged as an inextricable dimension of the master model that helps keep gender and related oppressions in place, a nuanced understanding of what is meant by nature and the natural, and how these are configured in relation to an often implicitly human culture, is required. Despite general feminist agreement that an association of women with a denigrated nature is problematic, feminist theory

provides numerous responses to the nature/culture dilemma, each with different implications. In order to make some sense of this diversity, I propose a four-fold schematization: (1) the 'switching sides' response; (2) the 'revaluing nature' response; (3) the 'repudiating nature/empowering culture' response; and (4) the 'rethinking nature/rethinking culture' response. This categorization inevitably blunts the nuances that characterize the many positions on this question and, moreover, many of the arguments rehearsed below are already well known to feminist theory. Yet, schematizing these arguments in specific relation to the nature/culture debate not only allows us to appreciate the complexity of the 'nature' question for feminists but, looking at the conceptual investments that follow from these arguments, might also better equip us, as feminist theorists, to be accountable for our own orientations and positions within the nature/culture debates.

FEMINIST RESPONSES TO THE NATURE/CULTURE DILEMMA

'Switching Sides'

According to the master model of nature/culture, women are devalued because of their association with nature. One response to this denigrated association is to make room, as it were, within the privileged side of the binary, for women to enjoy its benefits. Here, women 'switch sides'. The idea is that a repudiation of women's necessary association with physical, fleshy, bodily life and reproduction can unencumber them to meet men on equal terms in political and economic arenas. A nuanced version of this position is taken up by Sherry Ortner in her widely cited (and critiqued) essay 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?' (1972), mentioned above. Ortner suggests that a pan-cultural (although with various gradations) association of woman with nature is responsible for her oppression. The only way out of a (culturally constructed) circle that keeps women more

closely associated with nature, she contends, 'involves society's allowing women to participate in, and women's actively appropriating, the fullest range of social roles and activities available within the culture. Women and men can, and must, be equally involved in projects of creativity and transcendence. Only then will women easily be seen as aligned with culture' (Ortner, 1972: 28).

In the 'switching sides' response women are rescued from their association with a devalued 'nature', but, importantly, this move only makes sense when the chains of meaning associated with the nature/culture binary are left intact – that is, where culture becomes associated if not synonymous with intellectual, rational and civilized, and nature is left as its subordinated outside. Such a position might be, at best, naive and, at worst, pernicious. For many feminist thinkers, this 'rescue' from nature represents a desire to 'be like' men and does not tackle the question of how to account for men's own inevitably biological, fleshy and otherwise 'natural' aspects. Moreover, this position maintains a dangerous reliance on a denigrated outside: if women move over to the side of culture, then it is clear that this switch is available to only a limited group of women. The master model logic nonetheless keeps in place other terms – such as black, Third World, indigenous, as oppositional to white, First World and colonizer/settler – as unrecovered, while qualities that had been associated with women (body, spirituality, emotion, passivity, reproduction and so on) are disavowed. Moreover, nature itself remains a foundational term on the denigrated side. In her appraisal of Ortner's work, Stacy Alaimo writes: 'If woman's proximity to nature is responsible for her oppression, then her liberation, it would seem, is contingent on her distance from nature'; Ortner 'does not argue that we need to reevaluate why cultures debase nature, but instead accepts the nature/culture hierarchy in order to transfer woman to the elevated category' (Alaimo, 2000: 4). While it is critical to create a conceptual imaginary where

women are not tied to a particular set of terms and values, a response to the nature/culture question that posits the 'switching sides' of only some of the model's operative terms is untenable. Not only are the sticky associations not that easy for women to escape, but, moreover, this response neither acknowledges nor challenges how the exploitation of women and various 'natural others' are connected.

'Revaluing Nature'

A second approach to the nature/culture dilemma has been to reject not the association of the denigrated terms but the denigration itself. In other words, if 'woman' is tied to 'nature', this should not be understood as imbuing women with negative value. If we revalue nature – if we recognize it as a necessary, positive and valuable element – we might also recuperate the denigrated terms and bodies associated therewith. This position has been primarily associated with ecofeminism, even if this strand of feminist theory is sometimes unjustly caricatured. (Many feminist thinkers who seek to revalue nature explicitly challenge the idea of nature, as well as women's essential relation to it, as static or inert. This is discussed in more detail below.) Such revaluation also resonates with feminisms that value women rather for their (presumably) non-masculine attributes, or which are broadly concerned with rejecting a liberal model that aims to make women 'the same' as men.⁹

'Revaluing nature' nonetheless risks another kind of naive naturalization. Many feminists are wary of equating women with nature, invoking notions of Earth Mother, Mother Nature, woman as 'naturally' maternal, peace-loving and committed to the preservation of ecological integrity. Such views have been subject to charges of biological essentialism, reductionism and determinism, whereby women's association with the home and the natural world, and her innate capacities to give birth and nurture life, become the reductively defining features of her 'essential nature' and predetermine how she will engage

the world as a social agent. Early ecofeminist works such as Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) and Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (1978) have met with such charges and, despite their radical nature, are connected to what Catriona Sandilands calls a 'neoconservative rhetoric of motherhood environmentalism' (1999: 4).

The debates surrounding whether or not there is any biologically or socially privileged relation between women and nurturing of nature continue, and will probably remain inconclusive (advocates in both camps continue to provide indisputable proof of their position). It nonetheless seems prudent to be sceptical of any formulation that naturalizes a relation between women and the environment (Sandilands, 1999: 4); such associations themselves remain caught up in the very problem of 'natural others' that needs to be challenged. Moreover, as Stacy Alaimo points out, invocations of 'Mother Earth' do not necessarily result in better custodianship of the natural world, but might only serve to reinforce a trope of both woman *and* nature as the beleaguered domestic servant, cleaning up whatever messes we might throw at her. Here, environmental stewardship is depoliticized, domesticated and privatized (Alaimo, 1994: 137).

Nor does nature's recuperation offer a foolproof solution to the discursive and material violences done to all 'natural others'. For example, in her evaluation of the links between environmental degradation and coloniality, Andrea Smith points out that environmentalists are not necessarily supportive of indigenous struggles to exercise treaty rights to their traditional territories. Some environmentalisms, in their calls to limit human presence so that other species can flourish, are also guilty of obfuscating the colonialism and racism attendant in these calls. As Smith underlines, the brunt of such 'limiting' is borne by Native and racialized populations, whose genocide from epidemic diseases or other socially induced crises are too often viewed as 'nature's way' in a social Darwinist sense.¹⁰ While the impulse to

revalue nature in response to the master model logic *should* build solidarities between human and more-than-human others, in this case it is the human 'natural others' who remain instrumentalized and expendable. Meanwhile, Smith notes, the self-removal from 'nature' by settler human populations in order to 'save' it serves to 'reinforce, rather than negate, the duality between humans and nature' (Smith, 2005a: 63; see also Smith, 2005b); humans are still viewed as *outside of* and *separate from* the natural processes that otherwise require conservation.

Citing Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en tribal councillor Marie Wilson, Smith also reminds us that indigenous cosmologies reject the conceptual bifurcation between nature and culture – from this point of view, removing humans to make room for 'nature' is illogical. Donna Haraway puts it similarly thus: 'Efforts to preserve "nature" in parks remain fatally troubled by the ineradicable mark of the founding expulsion of those who used to live there, not as innocents in a garden, but as people for whom the categories of nature and culture were not salient ones' (Haraway, 2008: 158). Addressing the nature/culture problem requires, in this case, not so much a shifting around of terms and values within the bifurcation of nature and culture but a rethinking of the bifurcation itself. The 'revaluing nature' response is problematic primarily when this revaluing is framed as a reversal that maintains the dualism, if not the current hierarchy. Here, revaluation even *depends on* keeping the dualism itself intact. And, like 'switching sides', the 'revaluing nature' response is also inadequate when it recuperates some of the bifurcation's terms at the expense of the continued denigration of others. We need to continue cultivating ways of revaluing nature that do not subscribe to an either/or logic.

'Repudiating Nature/Empowering Culture'

A third response reconfigures the very categories of nature and culture: culture becomes a

powerful agent that shapes and controls what more essentializing views take to be nature's givenness. This response is associated with the 'cultural' or 'linguistic turn' in critical theory and the argument for discourse as a productive and determining phenomenon. Whether or not this 'turn' is a legitimate matter of chronological progression has been debated elsewhere (see, for example, Hemmings, 2011; Colebrook, 2009). Our issue here is not so much the timeline but the substance of this position, and its continued theoretical purchase. In the coarsest of terms, this position would claim that nature exists only to the extent that it has been constructed as such; anything deemed to be 'natural' is in fact a cultural construction. In other words, there is no nature, if what we understand as nature is self-evidently given, replete with an essentialized meaning that is always already there.¹¹

Judith Butler has become widely known for her assertions that not only is gender a cultural construction but sex – often assumed to be a 'natural' or 'biological' fact – is as well. For this reason her work is sometimes seen as emblematic of the 'repudiating nature' position. As Butler so famously argues, the 'production of sex as the pre-discursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by *gender*' (Butler, 1990: 7). Karen Barad points out that misleading caricatures of Butler's assertions would have her claim that bodies are constructed from nothing but words, discourses and ideologies – their fleshy matter vanishing into the thin (but immanently textualized) air (Barad, 2007: 192). More accurately, Butler's work can be used to show that 'repudiating nature' in favour of cultural or discursive construction is not necessarily a denial of 'nature' – as physical, fleshy, materiality. The 'nature' of the body in Butler's accounts is certainly material, but this materialization is a 'process' that 'stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface' (Butler, 1993: 9). On Butler's reading, 'male sex' and 'female sex' appear as 'natural' anatomical 'facts' only because we have already

constructed a gender binary into which all bodies must fit. Butler's argument is supported by research in feminist science, such as Anne Fausto-Sterling's work. In terms of the so-called 'naturalness' of a male–female binaristic understanding of biological sex, Fausto-Sterling's research shows that once a predetermining gender binary is bracketed, the biological expression of sex in humans expresses considerable variation (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). For Butler, culture sets limits on what is able to 'matter', where (natural) existence demands intelligibility. The 'natural' attributes and materiality of bodies, Butler proposes, may be just as constructed as their meanings. Here it serves to recall the slippery exchange between various meanings of 'nature' and 'natural' outlined above. What Butler repudiates is not the (natural) material stuff of bodies, but the (natural) accepted view of them as (naturally) innately belonging to one of only two sexual morphologies. These are the 'discursive limits' of bodies to which the subtitle of her book, *Bodies that Matter* (1993), refers. Caricatures of a social constructionist argument that deny the existence of materiality altogether have probably succumbed to the contagion of meaning that circulates between the various senses of the 'natural'.

At the same time, Butler *does* boldly demonstrate that even if the materiality of bodies requires more than discourse to literally bring those bodies into being, their material facticity is *also* profoundly shaped by culture. Culture, in other words, not only plays a serious role in shaping the 'mattering' of nature as intelligible but also intervenes in the very material, physical mattering of 'natural' bodies. This point is illustrated by Butler's ongoing commitment to supporting intersex individuals' demand for cultural intelligibility and their right to be free from unwanted interference in the physical shaping of their flesh. A lack of such recognition, Butler reminds us, can result in a very literal and material construction of sex, through undesired genital reassignment surgery and other medical interventions, in order to fulfil

the (cultural) requirements of a gender binary (Butler, 2004). Butler's insights here resonate across other feminist theories, where sex is not the only 'natural' matter that is literally (re)shaped by culture. In their examinations of medical experimentation, inequitable access to health care and chemical dumping in areas inhabited by poor, indigenous and other marginalized populations, feminist scholars of health and environmental justice underline the ways in which sexist, racist, colonial and disability-phobic ideologies make literal inroads into the flesh of those bodies subordinated according to the master model. Andrea Smith (2005a) notes that colonial ideologies have literally constructed the sterilized bodies of indigenous women; Anne Fausto-Sterling (2008) notes that racist ideologies can literally materialize the bone density of people of colour; Stacy Alaimo (2010a) describes the 'proletarian lung' – a diseased mound of tissue literally fashioned by cultural exploitation of working-class miners in the US. In insisting on the coming to matter of even our fleshy, bodily selves, these and other feminist theorists challenge the notion of 'biological essentialism' where certain bodies are this way or that way naturally. The meaning of bodies, biology or any other purportedly natural process or phenomenon is neither fixed nor immutable. By denaturalizing biology and the natural state of bodies, feminist theories such as these open up nature for a different sort of inscription.

This third response to the nature/culture dilemma thus offers two key and connected insights on nature/culture: first, approaches such as Butler's demonstrate that the *naturalization* of certain constructed meanings of 'nature' (in this example, 'sex') must be questioned. The second insight is potentially more radical in claiming that not only is meaning constructed but matter itself is constructed (shaped, moulded, injured, eradicated) in response to cultural values or pressures. Clearly, then, not all social constructionist positions deny the existence of nature. What we find instead

is an *empowerment* of culture – an instilling of social and cultural processes with a potent agency over nature.

While Butler's theories are careful to resist a complete slide into social determinism, her work (along with other social constructionist positions) has been critiqued for paying too little attention to the agency and limits of *matter*. Karen Barad notes that the most 'crucial limitation' of Butler's theory of materialization is that it limits itself to 'an account of the materialization of human bodies ... through the regulatory action of social forces'. While Barad emphatically supports the need to account for these discursive processes, she remains troubled by the exclusion of matter's limits; of 'how *matter* comes to matter' (Barad, 2007: 192). Physical, biological and chemical limits are also at play in bodies' materializations, just as various material apparatuses of knowledge, such as scientific instruments, also limit how matter makes itself felt (Barad, 2007: 208).

A response to the nature/culture question that emphasizes the agency of culture without recognition of non-human nature's own agency risks, as Stacy Alaimo puts it, a 'flight from nature' in feminist theory (2000: 1). Feminist theory has developed sophisticated theoretical frameworks that include multiple kinds of agency (see Bartky, 1995; Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000). Some theories also expressly challenge notions of humanist agency that are tied to a 'liberal progressive imaginary' (Mahmood, 2005: 155; see also Abu-Lughod, 1993). Agency within most feminist theory is nonetheless conceptualized in terms of human (although not necessarily humanist) agents. The idea that non-human beings might be agential remains at the fringe of feminist thinking.¹² The 'repudiating nature/empowering culture' position risks becoming tainted by a strong anthropocentrism that does not account for meaning and intentionality beyond the human and/or beyond human intelligibility. Again, we see that, rather than moving beyond the nature/culture binary with its associated hierarchies, this response can also unwittingly result in a

reinstatement of, rather than a challenge to, this dichotomous framework.

Understanding the powerful discursive and material impacts of human meaning-making systems has no less than revolutionized critical theory and has been groundbreaking in terms of providing feminist thinkers and activists with tools to contest the ‘naturalness’ of the inferiority of women, people of colour, indigenous people, queer people and other ‘natural others’. Yet – perhaps ironically – it is the insights of such positions that make possible a more radical rethinking of ‘nature’ as an intelligent, social, literate, numerate agent, knower and ‘constructor’, as discussed below. In other words, such empowerment of ‘culture’ should not be rejected, but we need to continue crafting theories that recognize its important insights and temper its potential oversights.

‘Rethinking Nature/Rethinking Culture’

Part of the difficulty with the above responses is that they all reply to the bifurcated dilemma of nature/culture with an ‘either/or’ response (switching, reversing, upending). In each case, the dualism itself is kept more or less in place. As Plumwood notes, the dualist western model of human/nature relations ‘requires anti-dualist remedies’ (Plumwood, 1993: 41). A fourth position attempts to sidestep this dualistic thinking, while nonetheless benefiting from some of the logics and contributions of the responses elaborated above. Here, nature and biological entities are understood as social agents of production and transformation just as much as culture is; culture is not only the purview of the human world but is enacted in and by nature, too.

Within feminist theories, such approaches are sometimes called the new materialisms (for example, van der Tuin, 2011); material feminisms (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008); post-constructionist feminisms (Lykke, 2010); posthuman feminisms (Barad, 2007); or nonhuman feminisms (see Hird and Roberts, 2011). Importantly, the views of the nature/culture relation proposed here are not entirely

‘new’ within feminist theories; Sara Ahmed rightly criticizes the ways in which the founding gestures of ‘new materialism’ do not account for ‘how matter matters, in different ways, for different feminisms, over time’ (Ahmed, 2008: 36; see also Lykke, 2010; Sullivan, 2012). We might instead interpret these new monikers as responding to the desire among some feminist thinkers to find a discursive gathering place for a common theoretical commitment – a gathering of that work which precedes these neologisms, as well as that which is still unfolding. The growing currency of the term ‘new materialism’ perhaps also signals discomfort with the various lacunae in other approaches to the nature/culture dilemma, as well as a mounting interest in exploring what the political and ethical obligations of feminism to other-than-human bodies might be.¹³

Gathering all of the arguments that fall into this category is reductive of their important nuances. These theories nonetheless share a commitment to questioning the bifurcation of nature and culture and, in particular, to challenging a view of nature as brute, inert matter. If what is ‘natural’ is assumed to be passively awaiting cultural inscription, and the subordination of women and other ‘others’ is secured by an insistence on the immutable ‘naturalness’ of their deficiencies, then recasting nature as dynamic, lively, changeable and agential significantly interrupts the logic of this denigration. Yes, this is a recuperation of nature, too – but on very different terms. For example, in a salient twist on the ‘repudiating nature’ position that suggests that nature is a constructed fiction, Vicki Kirby provocatively asks, ‘what if culture was really nature all along?’ (Kirby, 2008). What if nature writes, thinks, is literate and numerate, produces patterns and meanings, expresses sociality, intelligence, changeability, invention? What cultural constructionism positions as the purview of (human) culture is actually always already there in the complex interactions of the non-human ‘natural’ world: neural plasticity in cognitive science; natural selection in evolutionary biology; or the

'code-cracking and encryption capacities of bacteria as they decipher the chemistry of antibiotic data and reinvent themselves accordingly' (Kirby, 2008: 219). These examples all attest to creativity and 'language skills' before or beyond the cultural human. None of these examples evidences a deterministic, causal or 'essential' nature. Instead, each foregrounds the open-ended possibilities that natural matter is constantly taking up and unfolding. Given these complex feats, Kirby muses: 'Should feminism reject the conflation of "woman" with "Nature", or instead, take it as an opportunity ...?' (Kirby, 2008: 234).

Attending to nature's 'cultural' capacities also resonates with arguments for non-human agency. As Donna Haraway noted over three decades ago, 'in some critical sense that is crudely hinted at by the clumsy category of the social or of agency, the world encountered in knowledge projects is an active entity' (Haraway, 1988: 593). In contemporary terms, Karen Barad has most notably developed this idea in her concept of agential realism. According to Barad, 'agency is not aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity' (Barad, 2003: 826). The material world is replete with the capacity to enact agency – that is, to affect other entities, or to make and unmake them in the ongoing 'worlding' of the world. No agent – no person, no biological entity, no material artefact – controls the world, but all of these things enter into various relationships with one another: weather and landforms worlding hurricanes; boats and tides, weapons and disease, states and racist ideologies worlding colonization. In such intricate patterns of material relation, agency is dispersed through the material world. This view of agency does not undo feminist theorizations of agency as human power or empowerment to act, change or resist one's circumstances; rather, it situates other kinds of feminist agency within a broader context of the more-than-human world. In this sense, there is no a priori 'cut' between human and non-human, between culture and nature. Instead, there are variations within a broader more-than-human field.

As the work of Elizabeth A. Wilson and others highlights, this nature is also part and parcel of our human being. How can there be any definitive cut between non-human nature and human culture when the human is also significantly a biological and 'natural' entity? Wilson wonders why 'the body' – ostensibly at the centre of so much feminist discourse – has become so 'curiously abiological'; while experience, psychic structures, discourse and culture are all permitted, the influence of brute matter – of 'nature' – is not (Wilson, 1998: 15). Wilson's case is probably overstated (see Sullivan, 2012), but she makes an important point in her examination of biological and neurological processes in various psychological disorders. For example, she seizes on the idea of the 'biological unconscious' – a term coined by Sandor Ferenczi, erstwhile student and penpal of Sigmund Freud – to underline the point that the unconscious is not a disembodied, immaterial phenomenon; rather, it is manifest in our biological matter. Our organs – responding to psychological, social and physical circumstances – are 'knowing things' all the time: 'the [biological] substrata themselves [are] attempting to question, solve, control, calculate, protect, and destroy' (Wilson, 2004: 82). Wilson, for example, investigates 'pharmakinetics' – that is, circuits of sociality that mood disorder pharmaceuticals engage not only between brain and mood, but which also involve the viscera, the liver, food and environmental events such as trauma. Within these circuits, our bodily viscera *participate in* managing mood disorders in depressives (Wilson, 2008). Wilson cautions that in a 'post-Prozac environment', feminist accounts of depression that separate cultural and psychic malleability from biology are problematic (2008: 375). Wilson's work does not posit a mechanistic causality; rather, she traces the ways in which biological matter 'works things out' as they unfold. Wilson demonstrates that feminist work on psychic life can embrace innovative understandings of 'nature' and biological matter in game-changing ways.

'Rethinking nature' has also facilitated important connections between ecologically oriented feminisms and queer feminisms and sexuality studies. Once nature is recognized as continually opening to new iterations and recombinations of life, the nature that emerges is not only far from essentialist but also comes out looking rather queer – and 'all the better' for it (Alaimo, 2010a: 6)! One of the ways in which the nature/culture divide is used against women is an appeal to biological essentialism that destines women for heteronormative servitude. Queer ecological approaches underline that nature rarely follows the straight-and-narrow path. Myra Hird, for example, emphasizes that *schizophyllum* has more than 28,000 sexes (Hird, 2004: 86) and that 'most of the reproduction that we undertake in our lifetimes has nothing to do with "sex"' (2004: 85); Joan Roughgarden (2004) has catalogued the multitudinous ways in which non-human species are far from heteronormative. The point of these and other 'queer ecological' analyses is not to suggest that the lineaments of sociality evidenced in the non-human world are necessarily appropriate for humans. Moreover there is a problem with imposing human logics such as 'queer' onto non-human nature. To reveal these different patterns of sexuality as entirely 'natural' nonetheless challenges a master model view that would insist on a heteronormative 'naturalness' as a measure of acceptable human subjectivity.

In sum, to assume that innovation, agency and linguistic capacity are the purview of human culture alone is both an ignorant and arrogant anthropocentrism. To recuperate or revalue nature and associate that with women (or any other body – men, transgender people, mitochondria, bulrushes) is not biological determinism but an acknowledgement of their changeability, capacity for innovation and continual differentiation. This move also intervenes in the slippage between 'nature' and 'naturalness' upon which the master model depends: if one of the meanings of 'natural' is *that which cannot be altered*, this

corresponds very poorly with what we find in the 'natural' world.

At the same time, the 'rethinking nature' position is not without its own faultlines. In a mode of theory that locates all matter as agential and which intentionally blurs the once seemingly secure boundaries between human and non-human, and life and the non-living, there is a risk of what Stacy Alaimo refers to as a 'flat ontology' (Alaimo, 2012; 2013: 162 n.45). In a flat ontology all material entities are put on a level playing field – everything is an agent, a player. From a theoretical point of view, this is a compelling and even convincing exercise. But from the point of view of feminists concerned with ecological questions, the equation of toasters with tree-frogs or a Rolex with a once-raging river is an ethically and politically dubious move. New materialist feminisms must continue working out justifications – perhaps non-ontological ones – for these differences if this is to be a viable theory for expanding the discussion of feminist obligations in a more-than-human world.

Resonant with concerns over a 'flat ontology' are more general concerns about the borders of feminist theory, concern and obligation. Ecological and new materialist feminisms, in line with Plumwood's challenge to the master model, as described above, argue that in order to dismantle this conceptual logic and its consequences, none of the associated subordinations can be left unaddressed. On this view, the denigration of 'nature' *must* be a feminist issue. Yet not all feminist theories agree that environmentalisms – while espousing otherwise laudable goals – should be an explicitly feminist concern. Some feminist theorists (more so in corridors and conference sessions than in published writings) worry that detracting attention from the human subject of feminism would be a troubling dilution of its most important tasks. These debates are ongoing and point to opportunities, challenges and insecurities within feminist thinking that are not necessarily unproductive. A sustained evaluation of its aims and omissions is one of feminism's most important engines.

Moreover, even as the fourth position perforates the boundary between nature and culture as mutually exclusive terms, it does not eradicate the terms or their tenacious coupledness. Claims about the ‘culture’ of nature, ironically, still cannot entirely let go of a dualism where culture is the elevated term, just as championing the agency of matter still plays off against a (presumably, less appealing) passivity (see Chandler and Neimanis, 2013: 65). Even innovative ways of addressing the nature/culture question cannot do away with some reliance on the binary structure they seek to overhaul – if only as a terminological starting point for common intelligibility. Using either of these words becomes increasingly tricky (it seems that either everything is nature, or nothing is – and the same could be said about culture), but we use them nonetheless. This tenacity underlines the profound way in which these terms saturate our western hegemonic thinking processes. It is unclear whether we will ever be able to rid ourselves of these categories – or whether that would be even necessary, or desirable. In the meantime, innovative reimaginings of both the content of these two categories, and how they relate to each other – in non-bifurcated, non-dualistic ways – are welcome.

NATURE/CULTURE AND KNOWLEDGE: FROM EPISTEMOLOGIES OF IGNORANCE TO EPISTEMOLOGIES OF UNKNOWABILITY

Nancy Tuana puts her case plainly: ‘The separation of nature and culture has impoverished our knowledge practices’ (2004: 208). How does a rethinking of nature, culture and their relation to one another matter for questions of epistemology and the business of ‘doing’ feminist knowledge? Some of the ways are already implicit in the discussion above. First, if the limits and agency of non-human nature are to be taken seriously, and if we are going to map the entanglements of humans and non-human nature with rigour,

we are going to require what Stacy Alaimo, drawing on the work of environmental feminist Giovanna Di Chiro, calls ‘syncretic assemblages’ of knowledge (Alaimo, 2010a: 19). Such a syncretism might be understood as a mixing and melding of seemingly incompatible approaches in a courageous but cautious transdisciplinarity. It acknowledges that the complex relations between nature and culture cannot be adequately grasped through one method, or one school of belief, alone. Biology, sociology, philosophy, political science, physics, anthropology and chemistry will not necessarily enjoy the comfort of *corroboration*; rather, a sustained effort will be demanded of feminist theorists to accommodate multiple perspectives on multivalent truths.¹⁴ In more concrete methodological terms, this means continued innovation in mixed methods approaches. In-depth interviews may complement meteorological modelling of weather patterns in analysing low voter turn-out in elections; examining gender subjectivities in environmental hotspots may demand multispecies ethnographies as well as resource management data. Feminist theorists such as Evelyn Fox Keller, Sarah Franklin and Lynda Birke are pioneers in bringing biology together with feminist theory in a productive rather than dismissive dialogue; more recently, Karen Barad has done the same with quantum physics. Nancy Tuana reminds us that such transdisciplinarity is not easy (2008: 209), but challenging and overcoming institutional and systemic disciplinary habits can result in a situation where knowledge is an ongoing conversation rather than a definitive achievement. Genuine transdisciplinarity, moreover, is itself a practical challenge to the nature/culture (natural sciences/humanities) divide.

Epistemologies that challenge the master model bifurcation of nature and culture should also be, in Alaimo’s terms, ‘more capacious’. This means allowing ‘a space-time for unexpected material intra-actions, be they the actions of hawks nesting in high-rises or the effects of genetically modified plants on bees, butterflies, or human populations’ (Alaimo,

2008: 251–2). An epistemology that breaks down the nature/culture divide, and which is concerned for feminism's more-than-human others, is a roomy epistemology where all sorts of agents can thrive. The notion that knowledge should be generated through dispersed conversation is again relevant here: knowledge practices should, according to Alaimo, 'emerge from the multiple entanglements of inter- and intra-connected being/doing/knowings' (2008: 253).

Crucial to this notion of capacious epistemological space is a rejection of mastery. By rethinking the relation between nature and culture as one of co-constituted entanglements we can sidestep what Lorraine Code refers to as an 'epistemological monoculture' – a positivist post-Enlightenment legacy that strives for omniscience and that 'chokes out' any ways of knowing that contest the 'calculability of the world' (Code, 2006: 8–9). Code's call for 'multifaceted analyses' should not lead to the conclusion that with enough transdisciplinarity – with a sufficient number of perspectives or standpoints – the world might finally disclose itself to us. Even the widest array of transdisciplinary methods will not give us mastery. Feminist new materialists generally concur on this point: rethinking the relationship between nature and culture underlines the limits of human knowledge. These limits express themselves in two key ways. First, if nature is not the blank slate that culture reads and inscribes, but is rather entangled with culture (or, in Kirby's terms, actually *is* what we call 'culture') in the ongoing unfolding of the world, then what is to be known is by definition never complete or definitive; 'the material world intra-acts in ways that are too complex to be predicted in advance' (Alaimo, 2008: 259). As Barad puts it, 'the world's effervescence, its exuberant creativeness, can never be contained or suspended. Agency never ends; it can never "run out"' (Barad, 2003: 177). As such, any claim to fully 'know' it is absurd. Secondly, the agency and intelligence of non-human natures reminds us that we never have full access to any 'standpoint'. We can employ Haraway's 'prosthetic vision'

(1988) in accountable ways to cultivate our own situated knowledges, but this vision will only ever be partial. As Haraway argues, this does not make our knowledge any less valuable. Since all knowledge comes from somewhere, only by accounting for these locations – and their limits – could one ever claim objectivity in a feminist sense.

Epistemologies that reject mastery are not only sound and sensible knowledge projects; they are also ethically attuned to the ongoing denigration of 'natural others' – of all kinds. It is therefore telling to note the resonance between new materialist epistemological investments and post-colonial epistemologies, which are also deeply committed to challenging claims to mastery. Both nature and human colonized bodies have been 'thingified'. Haraway notes that, in a master model logic, 'nature is only the raw material of culture, appropriated, preserved, enslaved, exalted or otherwise made flexible for disposal by culture in the logic of capitalist colonialism' (1988: 592). So too does Andrea Smith remind us that 'the colonial/patriarchal mind that seeks to control the sexuality of women and indigenous peoples also seeks to control nature' (2005a: 55). The point here is explicitly *not* to equate the post-colonial marginalized other with a natural (read: less civilized, more pristine) state of being. Indeed, slippage toward these master model chains of meaning is the very trap that must be countered. But if this danger can be thwarted through a rethinking of nature, as proposed above, then post-colonial epistemologies can help clarify a key epistemological question for a rethought nature/culture relation, namely: who can, or should, speak for nature? How should nature/culture debates deal with the question of representation?

Gayatri Spivak (1988) famously asked whether the subaltern could speak as a way of highlighting the fraught nature of a colonial representation of the reality of colonized peoples. In terms that reverberate with Spivak's groundbreaking challenge to feminist theory and beyond, Catriona Sandilands also asks about the possibility of representing nature:

'Nature cannot be entirely spoken as a positive presence by anyone; any claim to speak of or for nonhuman nature is, to some extent, a misrepresentation' (1999: 180). Tellingly, the responses that both Spivak and Sandilands provide assert that this epistemological space is also an ethical one, where representation is sometimes necessary. In equal measures frustrating and illuminating is Spivak's insistence that such representation, including cultural translation, is '(im)possible'. This parenthetical ambiguity signals both the 'must' and the 'can't' inherent in this endeavour. Speaking for, or translating, are for Spivak acts of intimacy that must be done responsibly and that demand that difference – and thus the limits of knowledge – be safeguarded (Spivak, 1993). Similarly, Alaimo, referencing Sandilands' work, notes that environmental politics demands that we speak for nature, not only in spite of but *because* of the impossibility of the task (Alaimo, 2010b: 23). Haraway insists that facile analogies between colonized peoples and non-human nature are risky, as the strategies necessary for anti-colonial and environmental justice will necessarily differ (Haraway, 2008), but, in epistemological terms, both areas of inquiry involve attempts at representation that must acknowledge the drive to mastery. Both must instead seek out better ways to listen. In such cases, accountability for one's position is paramount, just as facilitating opportunities for conversation, rather than representation, need to be actively generated: 'We must find another relationship to nature besides reification, possession, appropriation, and nostalgia. No longer able to sustain the fictions of being either subjects or objects, all the partners in the potent conversations that constitute nature must find a new ground for making meanings together' (Haraway, 2008: 158).

As new materialist perspectives on the nature/culture debates demonstrate, humans are not separate or outside of nature. Humans are also 'natural'. This means that the epistemologies of unknowability demanded by a rethought nature are no less applicable to our own selves, and our human others. Nature is

never separate or distinct from culture (human or otherwise), and we need to recognize our incorporation of and contiguity with natures of all kinds. But even this intimacy does not give us full access, or mastery.

Given the contingent relationship between knowledge and being, where epistemological commitments determine what is real, what can exist and what has value, feminist quests to determine the terms of knowledge have also been a matter of survival (see Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Smith, 2005a). Nancy Tuana proposes that one of feminism's key epistemological tasks is to pay more attention to what is *not* known, and why. Tuana's work on the politics of ignorance is invaluable for attending to the ways in which 'practices of ignorance are often intertwined with practices of oppression and exclusion' (Tuana and Sullivan, 2006: vii). Drawing in part on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), which underlines how ignorance can be 'harnessed' and used as a political implement, Tuana reminds us that ignorance is not simply a lack of knowledge; it is rather 'frequently constructed and actively preserved, and is linked to issues of cognitive authority, doubt, trust, silencing, and uncertainty' (Tuana, 2004: 195). Clearly, there are many things that need to be known and which require a deliberate calling-out as manufactured ignorance. Tuana gives examples of women's health (Tuana and Sullivan, 2006) and female sexuality (2004) to demonstrate how ignorance is political, linked to gender oppression, heteronormativity and erotophobia; we could, similarly, look to politicized lack of knowledge on environmental toxins in our air- and waterways and their effects on indigenous, low-income and racialized communities (see Alaimo, 2010a). These are questions of social justice as much as matters of epistemology, as the costs of ignorance are never distributed equally across bodies. But calling out such ignorance must be tempered by a different sort of epistemological direction – namely, a respect and humility for that which we do not know and cannot know – or perhaps, more precisely,

for that which our knowledge can never fully master. Epistemologies of ignorance meet epistemologies of unknowability in the recognition that any knowledge project is a provisional effort. Truth is partial and unfolding, and perpetually open to contestation.

Grappling with the nature/culture question is an ongoing task for feminist theory. There is unlikely to be a 'right' answer to this problem; as the above inventory underlines, radically divergent approaches can all contribute to providing important conceptual and political tools for feminists seeking to challenge interrelated oppressions, including racism, heteronormativity and coloniality. And, while not all feminist theorists will agree on the urgency of this question, challenging the nature/culture binary also opens opportunities for addressing the oppression not only of human bodies but of the more (or less)-than-human bodies we call 'nature' too. There is no guarantee that conceptual apparatuses that challenge the master model will lead to more equitable gender relations, or more thoughtful environmentalisms (Alaimo, 2010a), for that matter. But as long as nature/culture remains a key issue for feminist theory we should be thoughtfully examining which oppressions we are challenging and which ones we might be shoring up in our own approaches to these questions – lest we be complicit in our own epistemologies of ignorance.

NOTES

- 1 In her lucid summary of Plumwood's position, Gaard suggests a list of the terms that are included in this binary (Gaard, 2001: 158):
 self/other
 culture/nature
 reason/nature
 male/female
 mind/body (nature)
 master/slave
 reason/matter (physicality)
 rationality/animality (nature)
 freedom/necessity (nature)
 universal/particular
 human/nature (nonhuman)
 civilized/primitive (nature)

- production/reproduction (nature)
 - public/private
 - subject/object
 - White/non-White
 - financially empowered/financially impoverished
 - heterosexual/queer
 - reason/the erotic
- 2 Important exceptions to the separation of men from the natural can be found, for example, in the Romantic cult of masculinity of the late 1700s in Europe, as well as in narratives about 'wild nature' as excluding women and fostering an ideal masculinity in colonial North America (Sandilands, 2005). Importantly, though, such exceptions were not available to all men, nor did they mean that women were granted reprieve from their relation to 'the natural' or permitted equal access to economic and political spheres.
 - 3 These examples are provided by Plumwood, Gaard and the author.
 - 4 See, for example, Brodie (2002) for a detailed account of how neoliberal policies of privatization, decentralization and individualization have been naturalized in the Canadian public sphere, to great detriment.
 - 5 As Charis Thompson points out, the politics of naturalization are not unidirectional: 'Sometimes important political and ontological work is done by denaturalizing what has previously been taken to be natural and deterministic; sometimes the reverse is necessary' (2001: 198). Thompson refers to the naturalization of certain kinship arrangements in the context of infertility. The strategic importance of naturalizing the mother–infant bond in order to fight for maternity leave allowances might be another example.
 - 6 These chains of meaning persist despite allocations of cultural meaning that seem to contradict this logic – 'wild' mountain men or 'unnatural' lesbians, for instance. But such examples are also either valorized (men) or denigrated (women) for failing to adhere to 'the natural order of things'.
 - 7 MacCormack (1980) and Moore (1994) both point to the ethnocentric and universalizing slant of Ortner's claim regarding the connection between bifurcated views of female and male as corresponding with nature and culture.
 - 8 Note Jasbir Puar's important critique of how the rise and popularity of intersectionality within feminist theory can also be read as yet another way – ironically – of reserving the 'centre' of feminism for middle-class, white women (Puar, 2012).
 - 9 E.g. Ruddick (1989), Gilligan (1982). Patricia Hill Collins' black feminist thought (2000) demonstrates a similar move, but recuperates a specifically racialized association as well. Each

position resists the naturalization of maternity, femininity and blackness as intrinsically negative.

- 10 On a similar view, the devastation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic particularly among gay men, and more recently, indigenous populations in North America, is seen as a 'natural' way of weeding out undesirable or unfit individuals and populations (Martin, 1994). While vulnerability to disease can certainly be influenced by genetics, gender or geography, such analyses must also consider social inequalities, colonial legacies and racist and homophobic health care and urban planning policies as significant and often determining factors. See also below on environmental justice.
- 11 Such claims also resonate (if somewhat ironically) in scientific and environmentalist discourses with the contemporary naming of the Anthropocene – our current era wherein nothing in Nature is untouched by humans (who are presumably 'non-Nature'). See, for example, 'Welcome to the Anthropocene' at www.anthropocene.info/en/home.
- 12 Feminist Science and Technology Studies is an important exception. Donna Haraway's work is a good example.
- 13 Theoretical concepts always respond to current contexts, events and concerns. A real or perceived increase in feminist thinking about the environment and the non-human – beyond those who call themselves 'ecofeminists' – is certainly connected to an increase in public concern about environmental issues such as climate change, as well as increased public awareness about factory farming and animal rights (Neimanis, 2013).
- 14 While this sounds similar to standpoint epistemologies, it differs importantly in that a privileged perspective from below is not a key element of these syncretic assemblages. While power plays are certainly part of disciplinary territorial battles, there may also be several marginalized knowledges across disciplines that come together to illuminate a multifaceted reality.

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