

Talking Back¹ to Feminist Postmodernism Toward a New Radical Feminist Interpretation of the Body

*If the body is a metaphor for our locatedness in space and time
and thus for the finitude of human perception and knowledge,
then the postmodern body is no body at all.*

Susan Bordo

If there is one thing that is clear in feminist postmodernism as the new millennium begins, it is that bodies are texts. And textual as they are, they are no longer the flesh and blood sites of oppression and liberation feminists theorized thirty years ago. They are sites of play, sites of performance, sites of chatechresis. I am interested in a new radical feminist account that both draws from the theoretical developments that turned the body into a text, and re-turns the body to its flesh and blood. This effort will take us into one of the central insights of feminist postmodernism's² account of agency, and subject this account to a Marxian turn on its head, in order to bring the body out of its textual playground and back to earth. "Back to earth" is meant literally here, as the earth itself in the "naïve" extra-textual sense, is both what brings us back and what we come back to.

This project is motivated by a certain dismay at the distance between feminist "high theory" in the U.S. and the most pressing political and social issues of our times. Particularly, in the face of unprecedented levels of global environmental destruction, we seem to be unable to articulate our relationship to the planet we inhabit in a politically meaningful way. The textual body, or in some accounts the virtual body, seems to have little relation to the body of the Earth, seems in fact to be the realization of that quintessential Euro-masculine fantasy of emancipation from necessity, where "necessity" serves as a negative marker for the relationship of dependence between humans and our environments, between persons and places.

A new radical feminist account of the body will call for a re-marking of this relation, and will draw on the feminist postmodern theory of “subjectivation” to do so. Radical feminists reading feminist postmodern theory have tended to respond defensively and dismissively. I find this response understandable but not particularly fruitful. It is understandable because radical feminism has itself been a prime target of derision and dismissal at the hands of theorists engaged in the development of feminist postmodernism, to such an extent that I think the “critique” of radical feminism has often functioned as an excuse for not reading radical feminist work, or for not taking it seriously. But a responding dismissal is not particularly fruitful. Radical feminist philosophy, like any thinking politics, needs to engage criticism in order to move forward. We need to read feminist postmodern theory closely, but we needn’t read it literally. There are many ways to read postmodernism, one of the most promising of which is as an expression of the phenomenology of life under globalization,³ under threat of environmental destruction. A critical reading can bring postmodern insights out of the discursive universe and into a philosophical engagement with lived bodies, and the body of the planet that sustains them (us).

How The Body Became a Text

Before the body became a text, it was, for U.S. American feminists, already a complicated thing. Of course, to call the body a “thing” is to lie about it already—is to belie the complexity that 1970’s feminists tried to engage. Various theorized as the site of oppression, or the site of liberation; women’s bodies, whether objectified, violated, pleased, over-worked, under-paid, wholly natural, socially constructed, or given by the goddess, were of central concern to second wave feminists. Early second wave women’s liberation politics called for social policies that

would give women control over their own bodies, particularly when it came to reproductive freedoms and sexuality, but also in connection with “women’s” work. Closely on the heels of this call came another, the demand to end violence against women. First the rape crisis movement then the movement against domestic violence addressed the social situation of women who were victims of male violence. The issue of women’s control over our bodies was connected with broader issues of sexual socialization, male dominance, economic disenfranchisement, housework, and sexuality as a site of women’s oppression. A burgeoning lesbian feminist movement theorized lesbianism as resistance to male domination, and androgyny as embodied resistance or “conscientious objection”⁴ to feminine socialization.

In the 1980s, the question of women controlling their bodies got even more complex. Much of this complexity hinged on whether or not many of the things women were doing with their bodies were seen as expressions of women’s control over their bodies or lack of it.⁵ Was it an expression of women’s control over their bodies to sell them in pornography or prostitution? Could a woman choose, was it in fact an expression of her control over her body and thus liberating for her to choose, “violation” in the form of masochistic sex? Could traditional femininity be liberating if a woman chose it? Could the decision to change her sex surgically and hormonally be an expression of her right to control her own body? These questions entered what came to be called “the sex debates” in feminism with a vengeance. To oversimplify a bit, how one answered them determined which side one was on. “No” to all of the above made one a radical feminist--the other side called you “anti-sex” or “cultural feminist” or “victim feminist”, and later “essentialist”. “Yes” to all of the above made one a pro-sex feminist—the other side called you “sex libertarian” or “anti-feminist”. Sitting the fence was another option, one that many feminists who felt allied with neither camp chose.

The 1990s brought a new turn to feminist philosophies of the body. The “pro-sex” feminists “won”, at least in academic feminist contexts in the U.S. Their focus on “free choice” in a rabidly individualist and voluntarist cultural milieu secured what can only be called a hegemony in U.S. academia for “pro-sex” feminism. Their notions of the body cohered more comfortably with postmodern theories than radical feminist notions. Postmodern theory had become more appealing to many feminists, and a new alliance between postmodernism and feminism⁶ was fast replacing the older alliance with Marxism.⁷ The feminist alliance with postmodernism has created a dramatic shift in feminist approaches to the question of the body.

One mark of this change is the collapse of the central conceptual paradigm that distinguished sex and gender, a collapse which occurred initially both inside and outside of the new feminist postmodernism. The old feminist distinction between sex (as natural and biological) and gender (as social and cultural) was questioned in social constructionist accounts that recognized gender’s influence in how sex was defined, articulated culturally, and lived.⁸ The value of these insights for feminism should not be underestimated. Initially change was fought for on the field of gender. But sex always returned as that natural, God-given, immutable fact of women’s existence. Women have babies. If they don’t have babies, at least they can. This is what sex is, and sex is presocial. Therefore every social policy that could be justified by reference to “real” sexual differences was. It was essential for feminists to question the sanctity of what was defined as presocial sex. As Catharine MacKinnon put it, “To limit efforts to end gender inequality at the point where biology or sexuality is encountered, termed differences, without realizing that these exist in law or society only in terms of their specifically sexist social meanings, amounts to conceding that gender inequality may be challenged so long as the central epistemological pillars of gender as a system of power are permitted to remain standing (1989,

233).” Gender became the primary of the two terms for feminists, but not as a superstructural formation of natural sex. Neither gender nor sex were seen as natural. Sex was a function of gender.

This critique was extended so much in postmodern accounts, that the gendered body today is not only cultural rather than biological, constructed rather than natural, but textual rather than material, or in some accounts virtual rather than real. Gender is contingent, malleable, and performative. It is not particularly intransigent. Such cultural “performances” as drag demonstrate that there is no “original” or “authentic” gender, to play around with, all gender is, essentially, gender play.⁹ The gendered body has become, in feminist postmodern accounts, the quintessential simulacrum, the copy for which there is no original.¹⁰ Today, the reigning wisdom in academic feminism sees the body as a discursive site. The body has turned into a text.

Judith Butler and the Textualization of the Body

Though one cannot attribute all of the positions in the above paragraph to Judith Butler, no feminist has been more influential in the development of feminist postmodernism in the U.S. than she has. Understandings, misunderstandings, and reworkings of her work are the bedrock of what counts as “good” feminist thinking in much of academia. At feminist conferences, hardly a session goes by without some positive attention to her writings, or favorable mention of her deconstructions of the central categories of second wave feminist thinking.

Butler’s work has been key in the importation of the epistemology of the simulacrum into feminist theory. The early feminist epistemology of unmasking, of sorting through appearances to get to the real underneath, has been discredited as “essentialist.”¹¹ Feminist standpoint epistemology was an attempt to respond to this accusation by using social location as a

“standpoint” from which at least local and situated knowledge could be articulated.¹² But it is the epistemology of the simulacrum that has become hegemonic for feminism at the turn of the millennium. Here “the real” plays a part only as that which dissolves into the appearances themselves. Behind the appearances, if there were such a place, would be only an abyss of absence.¹³

I want to take a closer look at how this epistemology functions in Butler’s book on the body, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex.”* I am interested in a critical reading of Butler’s notions of interpellation, of “constitutive outside,” and of her deconstruction of the notion of matter, not simply in order to say what I think she got wrong. Rather, I find her work, read critically, provides important provocation for the development of a new radical feminist philosophy of the body.

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler sets out to deal with some of the trouble that her former book, *Gender Trouble*, left unaddressed. She is responding to criticism that her earlier work left out “the material body.” “The question was repeatedly formulated to me in this way,” writes Butler, “‘What about the materiality of the body, Judy?’ I took it that the addition of ‘Judy’ was an effort to dislodge me from the more formal ‘Judith’ and to recall me to a bodily life that could not be theorized away. There was a certain exasperation in the delivery of that final diminutive, a certain patronizing quality which (re)constructed me as an unruly child, one who needed to be brought to task, restored to that bodily being which is, after all, considered to be most real, most pressing, most undeniable... And if I persisted in this notion that bodies were in some way *constructed*, perhaps I really thought that words alone had the power to craft bodies from their own linguistic substance (ix-x)?” Butler sets out to look more closely at what it means to say that bodies are socially constructed.

She disavows what she calls “linguistic monism,” where “socially constructed” means we are simply subjected by language, and agency is done away with entirely. But she is equally at pains to distance herself from a voluntarist notion of the subject, a notion some readers found in the idea of “gender performativity,” so central to *Gender Trouble*. If gender is something we perform, than doesn’t a “willful and instrumental subject, one who decides *on* its gender (x)” do the performing? How is it possible within this framework to preserve “gender practices as sites of agency (x),” while avoiding the two extremes, of a voluntarist subject or no subject at all? Butler’s answer to this question comes in the form of what she calls “constitutive constraint (xi).”

Butler is indebted here to Foucault and Althusser. Foucault’s notion of *assujettissement* “is not only a subordination but a securing and maintaining, a putting into place of a subject; a subjectivation (34).” Social construction is the process through which the subject is subjected in the double sense of bound and made. Agency is as much a product of the bonding as is “oppression”. “To claim that the subject is itself produced in and as a gendered matrix of relations is not to do away with the subject, but only to ask after the conditions of its emergence and operation (7).” Althusser’s notion of interpellation is key to Butler’s account as well. “In Althusser’s notion of interpellation, it is the police who initiate the call or address by which a subject becomes socially constituted. There is the policeman, the one who not only represents the law but whose address ‘Hey you!’ has the effect of binding the law to the one who is hailed. This ‘one’ who appears not to be in a condition of trespass prior to the call (for whom the call establishes a given practice as a trespass) is not fully a social subject, is not fully subjectivated, for he or she is not yet reprimanded. The reprimand does not merely repress or control the subject, but forms a crucial part of the juridical and social formation of the subject. The call is

formative, if not performative, precisely because it initiates the individual into the subjected status of the subject (1993: 121).” Butler’s own example is of the doctor whose exclamation, “It’s a girl!” is the first interpellating speech act that begins the process of “girling the girl” (1993, 7-8).

Interpellation, a kind of subjectivating definition, works as much through what is excluded as what is included. “To what extent,” Butler asks, “is materialization governed by principles of intelligibility that require and institute a domain of radical *unintelligibility* that resists materialization altogether or that remains radically dematerialized (35).” One way to understand this is certainly through what happens to intersexed infants. Between the culturally intelligible “It’s a girl!” and “It’s a boy!” is only the culturally *unintelligible*. What is unintelligible will not be “materialized” in that the material body of the infants will be altered to conform to one or the other intelligible cultural options.¹⁴

The unintelligible functions for Butler as a “constitutive outside” for the intelligible. Butler’s whole notion of “constitutive outside” is the key to her response to the question of the material body. The criticism has been, of course, that she has neglected *what is most outside discourse*, the body, but Butler’s response pulls the body back into discourse. “For there is an ‘outside’ to what is constructed by discourse, but this is not an absolute ‘outside,’ an ontological thereness that exceeds or counters the boundaries of discourse; as a constitutive ‘outside’ it is that which can only be thought—when it can—in relation to that discourse, at and as its most tenuous borders (8).” This “outside” will return to disrupt the coherence of the intelligible, and will return *internally*. “A constitutive or relative outside is, of course, composed of a set of exclusions that are nevertheless internal to that system as its own nonthematizable necessity. It

emerges within the system as incoherence, disruption, a threat to its own systematicity (39).” The “outside” was always the abjected and unacknowledged heart of the “inside”.

Butler’s deconstruction of the whole notion of “matter” is meant to show that “matter” operates as a constitutive outside for the social, a “pre-social” that the social requires for its own self-definition. But “matter has a history (29),” and it is to the history of matter as a sign that Butler turns her critique. Her account of this history is convincing, and she uncovers “a violation that founds the very concept of matter (53),” and its discursive function, “as the site at which a certain drama of sexual difference plays itself out (49).” Far from being the presocial “outside” to constructionist accounts, matter returns as the very notion that is socially constructed in the delimitation of the difference between the social and presocial. And this delimitation is far from innocent, it is complicit in the entire story of heterosexual hegemony. “To return to matter requires that we return to matter as a sign... (49),” she argues, since what we say about matter is always already caught up in the chain of signification that constructs it as a concept. After all, “the body posited as prior to the sign, is always *posited* or *signified* as *prior*.” This signification produces as an effect of its own procedure the very body that it nevertheless and simultaneously claims to discover as that which *precedes* its own action. If the body signified as prior to signification is an effect of signification, then the mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all. On the contrary it is productive, constitutive, one might even argue performative, inasmuch as the signifying act delimits and contours the body that it then claims to find prior to any and all signification (30).” In the beginning was the sign, on the second day, the body was born into discourse.¹⁵

I find Butler's deconstruction of the concept of matter convincing, moving even, and important for feminism. It is not, however, an adequate response to the question she purports to be addressing, which is not about the *concept* of matter at all. The question is about extra-discursive matter. To ask the question of the material body, is to ask the question of the relationship between the extra-discursive and the discursive. To "return to matter as a sign" is precisely to misunderstand the question, since matter *as a sign* is not *in* question. The question has to do, rather, with the stubborn fact of the *existence* of matter *extra-discursively*. Butler's use of the notion of "constitutive outside" serves only to *defer* the question of a *real* outside. Instead of grappling with an outside to discourse, she merely does away with the outside by showing how things that are *conceptually* excluded from certain notions, such as matter is to the social, are internally constitutive of such *notions*. Butler has essentially, and rightfully, pointed out that our concept of the social contains a repressed concept of the presocial that is foundational for it. This is not an unimportant accomplishment, because Butler also shows that the unintelligibility of the "constitutive outside" of such concepts functions politically in often heinous ways—and making the unintelligible intelligible is important political work. We think of matter as an innocent and presocial thing, while the concept we think it with, "matter," has been everything but innocent and pre-social.

If we accept this, which I certainly do, we are still left with the question of an outside that is *not merely internally constitutive* in Butler's terms, an outside that is not reducible to a moment of exclusion on the inside of the discursive "system," which is, it seems, able to digest just about anything. She has shown that *conceptually*, "matter," like every other *term*, can be deconstructively devoured by discourse theory. She has shown that how we think and live our bodies is discursively constrained. Butler has answered her interlocutors by brilliantly

illuminating a relationship *between concepts* but they have not asked after a relationship between concepts, they have asked after the relationship between a body as what precedes, exceeds, resists, or escapes discourse—and the discursive.

But in a brief passage entitled “Are Bodies Purely Discursive,” Butler does give an answer to the complaint I raise above. I am essentially accepting the philosophical position that the being of a concept, “matter” and the being of matter itself, are ontologically distinct and that this distinction is important. Neither need be “presocial” in the sense of unimpacted by or implicated in social or political relations of power. The ontological distinction between them does not mean that they are radically separate, but it does mean neither is reducible to the other. To return to our example above of the intersexed infant, the unintelligibility of the infant’s body to the doctors or parents results in a material intervention/violation of the infant’s body. What Butler calls the “chain of signification” is instrumental in the “re-materialization” (to use what is certainly too neutral and innocent a term) of the infant’s body as intelligibly male or female. But the intersexed body was there to begin with, and it is significant that many adults who discover that they were surgically “corrected” as infants experience a deep sense of violation at the revelation (Kessler, 1994). My example here is meant to counter Butler’s assertion that if “materiality is considered ontologically distinct from language,” then “the possibility that language might be able to indicate or correspond to that domain of radical alterity,” is undermined (68).

She goes on to argue that it is the ontological similarity between the two that provides the ground for a possible relation—language is itself material. The “phenomenality” of the signifying process requires, after all, that language make a material appearance, whether as sound, words on a page, or gestures. But in the next moment, a new “radical difference” is

introduced. “Apart from and yet related to the materiality of the signifier is the materiality of the signified as well as the referent approached through the signified, but which remains irreducible to the signified. This *radical difference* between referent and signified is the site where the materiality of language and that of the world which it seeks to signify are perpetually negotiated (my emphasis, 69).” The “radical difference” here is hard to pin down, it seems to exist in the *irreducibility* of the referent to the signified, i.e. the material body is not reducible to what we mean when we say “material body,” which is not reducible to the sign itself “material body”—though all are material. It is unclear why this “irreducibility” does not constitute an *ontological* difference, and it is equally unclear why, if it did, this would mean that the “referentiality of language,” would be undermined.

Indeed, elsewhere Butler raises these same questions, and responds to them very convincingly. In a searing criticism of Lacan, Butler takes on the notion that an ontological difference between the penis and the phallus necessarily sets the phallus free of its debt to the penis, to operate as a privileged signifier. Summarizing Lacan’s position, Butler writes, “The phallus symbolizes the penis, and insofar as it symbolizes the penis, retains the penis as that which it symbolizes; it is not the penis... The more symbolization occurs the less ontological connection there is between symbol and symbolized... Symbolization depletes that which is symbolized of its ontological connection with the symbol itself (83-84).” Against this argument, Butler asks, “What is the status of this particular assertion of ontological difference... if the penis becomes [always] the privileged referent to be negated?” In spite of their different kinds of being, “the phallus is bound to the penis through determinate negation. Indeed, the phallus would be nothing without the penis (84).” By what assumption could we conclude that different kinds of being so radically escape one another? What is the status of the assertion that an

ontological difference between the being of language and the being of materiality would necessarily seal them off from one another rather than help to explain their relation to one another? Yet such an assertion would maintain the irreducibility of the one to the other, which Butler purports to want to do as well, so why the denial?

Her denial of the ontological difference between language and materiality seems to be what enables Butler to *re-collapse materiality back into language*—to ultimately sidestep the very irreducibility she claims to defend. She defines the question of the relationship between the two as follows: “To answer the question of the relation between the materiality of bodies and that of language *requires first* that we offer an account of *how it is that bodies materialize* (my emphasis, 69).” Butler’s “requires first” serves to establish a priority. From here, where will her account take us? Back to language, which again becomes the privileged and indeed active term of the two—language materializes the body. The example of the intersexed infant certainly shows that language, in the fuller sense of a “chain of signification” and an arbiter of intelligibility, does and can impact the material world in heinous ways. Yet the infant had a body, certainly, before it was surgically altered, that was materialized outside of the ‘chain of signification’—and this body is not to be reduced to a “constitutive outside,” to a mere function of the system of gender intelligibility. This body is what we feel has been violated when we respond to the surgical “sexing” of intersexed infants with horror. We recognize there was something there, however “unintelligible” before the “materialization” of the body into the intelligibility of the chain of signification. But in Butler’s account the body is reduced, again, to a mere function of discourse.

It remains unclear why we are bound—“required first”—to approach the question in the way Butler prescribes. Required by whom? If we must ask *first* after the materialization of the

body (in language), then the intersexed body of the infant is disciplined out of our inquiry. It would be something like an original, for which there is no copy—and in the world of discourse we can attend only to the copies, for which there are no originals. Why would we not ask after the *material* materialization of the body—or has this materialization been rendered unintelligible by discourse theory? Why would we not ask how language is materialized, and find our answer in the body? Isn't it, after all, the body that materializes language—how would we speak without breath, write without any body at all? The material materializers of the body—breath, water, food, light and warmth—sustain our speech. This materiality certainly merits our attention. Could it be that Butler's account serves to deconstructively discipline the body into occupying a discursive universe, sealed against the possibility of an ontologically different, and now discursively unintelligible, materiality? Could it be that the tendency Butler takes note of, the tendency of bodies to “indicate a world beyond themselves,” is effectively effaced, or in her terms abjected, by the active and determinate role assigned here to language as the materializer of the body?

Disciplining Feminism

Since asserting this difference, an ontological difference between words and things, will open me to charges of “essentialism,” a lengthy digression is necessary here, to call into question the status of that particular accusation. Particularly in the U.S. American context, feminists tend now to identify any talk of the extra-textual body as “Essentialist!”, where the word in its accusatory form functions to discredit and silence. Even social constructionist approaches to the body, if they do not see the body as sufficiently textual and contingent, are accused of “falling into” essentialist traps.¹⁶

Emphatic anti-essentialism is part of what defines the alliance between feminist thought and postmodernism. The term serves to “mark” something as antithetical to postmodernism, and increasingly, antithetical to feminism. The philosophical and political stakes that make the question of essentialism such a charged one remain largely unaddressed. This is to say it functions as *the antithesis* of postmodern correctness. The accusation “essentialist!” has come to exercise a disciplinary force among feminists, while attempts at critical intervention receive far too little attention.¹⁷ Particularly when it comes to feminist theories of the body, it is important to consider how anti-essentialism functions to derail feminist investigations of the lived body, before they have even been seriously undertaken.

I use the descriptive term “emphatic” to differentiate postmodern anti-essentialism from earlier feminist and anti-racist criticism which stressed that the wrong sorts of essentializing notions were applied to women or various races. Starting with Beauvoir’s manifesto-like proclamation that women are made not born,¹⁸ feminists threw the patriarchal claim that “biology is destiny” under the light of critical scrutiny. Women’s hormones, anatomy, and physiology (especially in terms of menstruation and reproduction) did not and could not justify the political and social domination of women by men. Feminists set out to “tell the truth” about women, against what were recognized as essentializing fictions, using language in the process that essentialized women in another way. This later discovery came first from women of color and lesbians who criticized the falsely inclusive use of the category of “woman” much as other feminists had criticized the falsely inclusive categories of “mankind” or “human”.¹⁹ Monique Wittig’s own manifesto, “Lesbians are not women,” functioned as an ironic addition to Beauvoir’s earlier claims.²⁰ These criticisms surfaced initially in the context of feminist political work, and were sparked by very concrete issues of power within the feminist

movement.²¹ They neither defined essentialism so broadly, nor disregarded it on principle²² as is generally the case today.

The academic theorization of essentialism in the late 80s and 90s, however, has become a *quest for theory purified* of essentialism.²³ This took the form initially of academic feminists pitting postmodern theory against older activist-based feminist theory, and finding feminist theory inadequate.²⁴ Particularly, feminist theory in its “radical feminist”²⁵ form, was found to be essentialist.²⁶ “Essentialist!” took on almost battle-cry status in academic feminist circles, and the accusation became one that both shamed and discredited. Efforts to critically intervene in this situation, have been passionate, and have come from many corners of the feminist movement. Yet these politically diverse voices have been too few and far between to stem the tide of anti-essentialist orthodoxy. I quote just three of a myriad of such efforts from diverse thinkers in feminism here, in order to show that the critical response to anti-essentialism has been widespread, though apparently having little impact.

Has essentialism received a bad rap? Few other words in the vocabulary of contemporary critical theory are so persistently maligned, so little interrogated, and so predictably summoned as a term of infallible critique...as an expression of disapprobation and disparagement (Fuss 1989, xi).

The term essentialism covers a range of meta-critical meanings and strategic uses that go the very short distance from convenient label to buzz word. Many who, like myself, have been involved with feminist critical theory for some time and who did use the term, initially, as a serious critical concept, have grown impatient with this word—essentialism—time and again repeated with its reductive ring, its self-righteous tone of superiority, its contempt for “them”—those guilty of it (de Lauretis 1994, 1).

“Essentialism” is the nemesis of “post-modernist” feminism. It is its chief target of attack, and yet the critique of “essentialism” relies on the very framework post-modernism is at such pains to reject. The meaning of “essentialism” depends on a master narrative of truth. “Essentialism” is to be avoided because it is false, and it is judged to be false from a position which is outside all positions, on criteria which would be everywhere and always the same (Thompson 1996, 334).

Despite these critical voices, today, the term “essentialist” functions more than ever to discipline feminist thinkers in the academy, rather than to inspire careful scholarship.²⁷ “Essentialist!” has become an interpellation, a performative speech act. I borrow my terms here from Butler herself, but deploy them in an unusual direction, perhaps even catechrestically. The accusatory “Essentialist” has come to function with a self-legitimizing authority, to “essentialize the essentialist,” whose work need not be carefully read or responded to once this accusation has functioned to dismiss it as “bad feminism.”²⁸

It is impossible to deny that the concerns motivating feminist anti-essentialism, even in its emphatic form, are deep and serious. Particularly, real movement-based political struggles over exclusion and inclusion have fueled the anti-essentialist fire. Yet emphatic anti-essentialism has served much less as a political corrective to inequalities of power between women, which remain, in academia, remarkably unchanged—than as an intellectual policing tool that marks *theory* as pure or impure. This situation has far-reaching implications for feminism. Feminist efforts to think, write, speak, campaign, protest and in general *change* the ways women’s bodies are controlled socially and lived personally, *extra-textually*, are curtailed.

Dependence

It is important to consider what is disciplined out of feminist philosophies of the body by emphatic anti-essentialism. A careful consideration of all the aspects of this disciplining is beyond the scope of this essay, but I would like to at least note one of these aspects here, and discuss a second more fully.

Any notion of bodily violation is immediately subject to accusations of essentialism, depending as it seems to, on an implicit “original” body that has been violated. If the subject is produced in the very act of violation, then the violation becomes more enabling than egregious. This effectively disables feminist claims of harm in discussions of pornography, rape, or domestic violence, as it becomes impossible to identify *who* is being harmed. The political consequences of the disciplining of feminism away from consideration of bodily violation/harm are deep and far-reaching.

In this essay, I am concerned more primarily with the disciplining out of feminist concern with the *biological body*. I return here from my lengthy digression into the status of accusations of essentialism to the question left dangling earlier, the question of the material materialization of the body and language. The biological body seems to have all but disappeared under conditions of postmodernity, where hormone treatment, plastic surgery and reproductive technologies appear to have done away with biological intransigence once and for all. While feminist efforts to unlink biology from destiny were extremely important to the birth of the feminist movement, and a return to an account of women’s social position as causally linked to women’s biology is neither desirable nor possible, biology remains an important part of how bodies are lived. We are not (and here my “we” includes all humans) emancipated from our biological bodies in any decisive way, even if they have been rendered unintelligible in certain cultural contexts.

Feminists whose focus on women’s bodies has led to charges of essentialism, have generally focused on how women’s bodies differ from men’s, how reproductive, sexual or hormonal differences might provide a key to understanding women’s social, moral, or political differences from men—where these differences are understood as positive (i.e. the argument that

women make better moral choices than men, for example). Closely related has been an account of women's social role in raising and nurturing children as foundational for women's differences from men.²⁹ These views have been criticized, in my opinion sometimes correctly, but often dismissively, as "essentialist" –with essentialism in this case implying a return to or approximation of a patriarchal "biology as destiny" perspective.

Many feminists have been rightfully suspicious of efforts to define human differences biologically, since such efforts have long been key components of European racism. European science has shown itself to be virtually obsessed with finding the anatomical or now genetic explanations for racial differences, and with using supposed biological differences to justify all manner of social and political injustice. The same suspicion also marks disability rights activism, gay rights activism, and much feminist activism as well. All of these groups have every reason to resist any return to the territory of biology as causally explanatory for social, economic, or political differences between humans. In the context of feminism, because women's reproductive capacity or role has been used for centuries to justify women's political disenfranchisement, feminists who ground their own notions of women's difference in biology, are treading on ground that the rest of us have every reason to call "dangerous."

At the same time, I find the rejection of efforts to explain women's social or political differences from men biologically does not justify a wholesale censure of feminist inquiry into the more philosophical questions of what it means to live as embodied beings *at all*. I am particularly concerned that an area of inquiry that offers great promise in terms of understanding what we share with others across all manner of differences is excluded from what counts as "good feminism". Bodies as texts will yield difference, since the way bodies are inscribed is everywhere local, specific, and culturally and historically bounded. It is the extra-textual body,

the body that has to breathe, drink, eat, absorb light and warmth, to live—that is the body-in-common.³⁰ It is also this extra-textual body that remains dependent on the earth for sustenance.

But what is an *extra-textual* body? In what does its irreducibility to the textual consist? The *textual* body, as we have seen, is a body that is culturally inscribed, written on, so to speak—yet not in the sense of some “original” natural thing, some primary matter on which the social is *later* inscribed. The body comes to be an intelligible body at all in the very process of its inscription. It is *interpellated*, meaning subjected in the double sense of being made a subject (agent) and a subject (loyal follower) at the same moment. It is a body that *performs* its subjection in both senses of the word, its subjection to authority and its subjective resistance to authority. Gender is “written” on this body and “read” from it. It is a body that is marked, defined, disciplined into being this or that gender, this or that race, but not from some original genderless, raceless material. Like gender itself, the body is a simulacrum, a copy for which there is no original. It becomes a body through its being gendered, through its being raced. It may be a body that is surgically, hormonally, anatomically altered to fit a foregoing definition or an individual preference—but what is altered cannot be understood to be some authentic, original thing, what is altered is no-thing at all until the alteration makes it into, marks it, as just this sort of body.

By insisting on the irreducibility of the body to language, I am not *opposing* the material body to the textual body. I am not asserting an extra-textual body in the sense of some primary, original, untainted *antithesis* to the social. I am insisting, rather, on a body that can never be wholly claimed or contained by the language that does, indeed, inscribe it, even by a sophisticated deconstructive slight of hand. This body, in fact, materially *produces* language. It is itself as much *materially* produced as it is discursively. I am insisting on bodies that live,

again in Butler's words, in "a world beyond themselves," where "this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself," is "quite central to what bodies are (ix)." In this sense, the body is the boundary between discourse and the material, but boundary is surely the wrong word, it is more appropriately the link between words and things. It is inscribed by discourse, but produces discourse. It is materially produced but produces materially. The body so understood, is reconnected to its place, its environment, the Earth itself.

It is certainly a cultural achievement of enormous proportions to have rendered such a connection unintelligible, but this is precisely the circumstance we find ourselves in under conditions of postmodernity. Postmodern theory celebrates these circumstances uncritically, demonstrating deconstructively that our experience of being set adrift from the world and sealed into language is "true" at the same time the theorist breathes, drinks, and eats to sustain her capacity to deconstruct.

From a different corner of the world of feminist theory, Eva Kittay's most recent book, *Love's Labour: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*, contributes to the effort to make the materiality of the body intelligible. She takes the universality of the human condition of dependence (i.e. that all of us at least begin our lives dependent for our very survival on others), to found new notions of equality in an ethics of care. She focuses on dependency work as a kind of labor that is both necessary and sustaining for human life, though marginalized in areas of social thought that have taken the autonomous individual as their model of normalcy.³¹ Kittay's work primarily addresses intersubjective dependence, but has important implications for another kind of dependence, that of all humans on the Earth. Even the "original" dependence of the embryo on the human mother is "nested" in a prior and on-going dependence of the mother on the Earth itself. Activities such as breathing, eating, drinking,—all attest to the porosity of the

border between self and world, and to this primary dependence. Kittay's epistemological move is to see the experience of human dependence as a place from which we can and should know what is essential to just social policies.

Similarly, our dependence on the earth can be understood to be a place from which we can and do know, and articulate, the materiality of the body. Ironically, it will be the postmodern notion of subjectivation that will turn us toward a new feminist understanding of the material materialization of the body. This central postmodern insight, whereby discourse is understood to subject the subject, in the double sense of bound and make, must be brought out of the sealed discursive universe and down to earth. If we understand dependence on the Earth as not simply what bounds the subject, though it does, but what *produces* the subject materially, the postmodern notion of subjectivation can be reworked on a material level. Just as postmodern theory has claimed that discourse constructs the subject, we see that outside of and prior³² to discourse the earth itself "constructs" and sustains the subject, moment by moment.

Human beings are so radically dependent on the earth, we still cannot survive for more than four minutes without "taking in" the earth as breath. Where is this dependence? It is precisely on the porous boundary, the body, which links us to the immediate places we find ourselves (Casey 1993). The earth sustains us only by crossing over this porous boundary, only by entering and leaving our bodies. The things that sustain us moment by moment; air, water, food, light and warmth, do not cease to sustain us because of a fantasy, whether Euro-masculinist or feminist, of emancipation from them. Our life-sustaining relationship to the places we inhabit may be "disciplined out" of feminist theory in the academy, but it can never be disciplined out of our lives.³³ The earth is not our prison, but a *productive place* we inhabit, that constitutes and enlivens us moment by moment. "Freedom" from the earth, from this perspective, is suicidal. And indeed, the ongoing ecological destruction of our planet has been pointed out by many to be a kind of "suicide".

A radical feminist philosophy of the body starts from this insight, that *places are subject-productive*. This is a bare dependence that is most certainly “universalizing” and “essentialist.” It also pulls us out of our containment in a sealed textual universe and back to the Earth that gives us life, breath, and thus speech.

If we move toward new radical feminist interpretation of the body that calls for a reconnection of bodies to the places that sustain them, we also move toward *prioritization* of place, and a *politicization* of our relationships to place. Some directions such a prioritization and politicization might take us are: to a more widespread focus on feminist environmentalism, feminist geography, and feminist urban planning; to world food politics; to global indigenous human rights activism; to feminist architecture and alternative building practices. The list, as for any list of “what feminists are interested in,” could go on endlessly. The point here is that when we start from an understanding of the earth and all the particular places it provides us as *productive places*, as places that enliven, enable, and materially construct the bodies that inhabit them, as places in and through and in relationship to which we are subjectivated—made subjects—we are opened to and engaged immediately with the “world beyond.” The distance between feminist “high theory” and the pressing social issues of our times is narrowed. The textual universe loses its exclusive hold on us. We return from a fantasy of discursive emancipation from our “imprisonment” in a material body that lives in a material world—to acknowledge a material world that makes and remakes us moment by moment. We return, against the grain of the phenomenality of daily life under conditions of postmodernity, to the earth itself. This earth is not a prison-house, and the body that returns to it is not a text.

¹ I am taking the term “talking back” from a section of Judith Butler’s *Bodies That Matter* where she tries to distinguish mere repetition from a kind of repetition or “performance” of gender that is “a kind of talking back” or resistance (132). She is attempting here to talk about resistance as something that takes place in the “slippage between discursive command and its appropriated effect (122).” I mean my use of the term to imply both an

appropriation, and a making over, of feminist postmodernism.

² Butler might say that my very use of the term “postmodernism” in the sweeping way I use it here is an “effort to colonize and domesticate these theories under the sign of the same, to group them synthetically and masterfully under a single rubric, a simple refusal to grant the specificity of these positions that provides an excuse not to read, and not to read closely (Butler 1990, 4).” Postmodernism is admittedly a diverse and self-contradictory field, as is modernism, of course. Postmodern theories have legitimately looked for the “foundations” of modern thought, lumping things together in the process, in order to try to name and criticize what various modernisms have in common. If various postmodern theories have laid down certain common foundations in spite of their differences, and I believe they have, it is also important to “find a way to bring into question the foundations it is compelled to lay down,” also in Butler’s words, “It is this movement of interrogating that ruse of authority that seeks to close itself off from contest that is, in my view, at the heart of any radical political project (ibid., 8).” Here I try to “find a way” to question what has apparently become unquestionable in much academic feminist practice—the textualization of the body.

³ Here I am writing in agreement with such thinkers such as Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, Terry Eagleton, and Seyla Benhabib, who have defined their projects against postmodernism more than with it, yet are deeply engaged in and with the central concerns that postmodern theories raise. I share a central belief with this emergent critical tradition—that postmodernism has material conditions. Such notions as “textuality” and “difference” are interpreted in part as “symptoms” (or simply phenomenological descriptions) of experience under conditions of extreme reification. In other words, we really do experience ourselves as set adrift in the sign-world of the text, or caught up in an endless play of difference—but these experiences themselves are symptomatic of the material conditions that they seem to deny. Here there is an “outside” to the power of discourse that relocates discourse “inside” a historical time period and its social and political materialities. Judith Butler sees the view that “historically a set of theories which are structurally similar emerge as the articulation of an historically specific condition of human reflection,” as a “Hegelian trope,” which serves to falsely unify diverse theories under the assumption that they “symptomize a common structural preoccupation (1990, 5).” This underlying view in turn “authorizes” the falsely universalizing sign “postmodern.” I dispute this view, along with Fredric Jameson, Terry Eagleton and others. Although I don’t believe developments in theory are simply reducible to certain historical causes, I do believe that writers of theory are immersed in material conditions that constitute, at least in large part, certain concerns as more central than

others, and that it is valuable to bring the conditions which constitute these concerns under reflective scrutiny.

⁴ Sheila Jeffreys, in her account of early lesbian feminism, refers to lesbian feminists as “conscientious objectors” to gender. She also argues that “Lesbian feminists have always been radical social constructionists in their approach to lesbianism (1996, 361, 367).”

⁵ I am leaving out the important role played by the enthroning of desire over reason in postmodern theories more generally. “Control” may be a misleading term, since a right to express wayward desire does not necessary correlate on first glance with a notion of “control”—but even so, having the right to desire in feminist postmodernist accounts, whether or not by way of unbridled expression, certainly meshes with early feminist claims that women should have the power to decide their bodily destiny, in sex and pregnancy.

⁶ The flurry of publications that established this new relationship took, in its early years, the form of disavowals of the “essentialism” of “cultural feminism” (a new, politically charged term for radical feminism), followed by an articulation of the superior intellectual framework of some progenitor or proponent of postmodern theory. As Theresa de Lauretis wrote at around that time, “Anglo American (feminists) seem for the most part to be engaged in typologizing, defining, and branding various ‘feminisms’ along an ascending scale of theoretico-political sophistication where ‘essentialism’ weighs heavy at the lower end (2).” Some early examples include Linda Alcoff’s 1988 *Signs* article, “Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory,” Alice Echol’s 1983 piece in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, entitled, “The New Feminism of Yin and Yang,” and 1984 article in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, entitled “The Taming of the Id: Feminist Sexual Politics,” and Chris Weedon’s 1987 book *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, all enthusiastic about what postmodern theories had to offer feminists. 1990, 4.”

⁷ In 1979 Heidi Hartmann had written “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union,” amidst a flurry of publications about what was, by most feminist accounts, an extremely unsatisfactory “union” (Patcheski 1979; Sargeant 1981; Weinbaum 1978). The central complaint Hartmann raised was that, “the ‘marriage’ of marxism and feminism has been like the marriage of husband and wife depicted in English common law: marxism and feminism are one, and that one is marxism (424).” This outpouring of dissatisfaction, however hopeful initially for reconciliation, ended in a nasty divorce sometime in the 1980s.

⁸ For both Catharine MacKinnon, a radical feminist influenced most directly by Marxism and the central figure in radical feminist theory in the academy, and Judith Butler, the central figure in the establishment of feminist

postmodernism—the collapse of this distinction is key to their theoretical work. Both argue that the intelligibility of sex is constructed through the social conventions of gender. (MacKinnon 1989, Butler 1999).

⁹ A classic formulation of this idea can be found in Butler's 1991 essay "Decking Out: Performing Identities." She gives credit to Esther Newton for the insight that drag "enacts the very structure of impersonation by which *any* gender is assumed (21)." This has profound implications for our understanding of gender, "Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. If this is true, it seems, there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself (21)."

¹⁰ And this body is the "site" of the new feminist epistemology of the simulacrum. Soja's brief rendition of Baudrillard's "4 epistemes," is useful here. The first, where appearances mirror reality, gives way to the second, where appearances are thought to be deceptive and must be sorted through to get to the real underneath (this is the "counter-epistemology" of critical theory and practice according to Soja, and this was early 2nd wave feminist epistemology as well). "Baudrillard's third phase, wherein the image masks the growing absence of a basic reality as a prime referential, can be interpreted as the inaugural moment of contemporary postmodernity and the first step toward the denouement of his fourth phase, when all images become their own pure simulacra, bearing no relation to any reality whatsoever (120)."

¹¹ Mary Daly's classic formulation of feminist epistemology as a journey from the foreground world of deceptive patriarchal appearances to the Background realm of "Wild Reality," first appeared in print in 1978. Another formulation was published in 1989 with MacKinnon's treatise on the practice of feminist consciousness raising, here "Consciousness raising is a face-to-face social experience that strikes at the fabric of meaning of social relations between and among women and men by calling their givenness into question and reconstituting their meaning in a transformed and critical way (1989, 95)." Though very different in starting points and assumptions, both of these accounts involve a sorting through of the givenness of patriarchal relations and the emergence of another (deeper) meaning.

¹² For a good account of the history of and debates about feminist standpoint epistemology see *Feminist Epistemologies*, edited by Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter, especially "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is Strong Objectivity," by Sandra Harding and "Marginality and Epistemic Privilege," by Bat-Ami Bar On.

¹³ Butler is certainly the most well-known feminist in the U.S. American academy whose work turns on the abyss of absence at the heart of the real. Though there are moments of ambiguity in Butler's work, and even confusion, this theme remains central throughout. Her critiques of Lacan and Zizek, for example, involve the deconstruction of their notions of "lack" to uncover the prediscursively fixed real (the threat of castration) that is smuggled in under the sign of absence. Butler excavates an even deeper abyss at the heart of "the rock of the real (Butler 1993, 187-222)." The influence of Butler's work, and especially her epistemology, on U.S. American feminism, has been dramatic and widespread. There is hardly a session at a feminist academic conference in which Butler's work, particularly in terms of its epistemology, is not favorably mentioned.

¹⁴ The precise nature of this intelligibility is described in Suzanne Kessler's study of the medical management of intersexed infants, "The Medical Construction of Gender." Kessler shows that the single factor determining an intersexed infant's "sex assignment" is penis size and functioning, independently of chromosomes, or other anatomical factors. Here femaleness is understood to be the absence of maleness, defined as having a decent sized, potentially sexually functional penis (225).

¹⁵ I am playing on Catharine Mackinnon's similar wording to describe the perceived relation between dominance and difference (1989, 220).

¹⁶ Catharine Mackinnon comes to mind as a clear example of an almost dogmatic social constructionist who is regularly and almost ritualistically accused of essentialism. Cressida Heyes argues in her recent book, *Line Drawings*, that feminist anti-essentialism is today focused on essentialist moments within social constructionist arguments.

¹⁷ One of the earliest attempts to grapple critically with this situation I know of, was Diana Fuss's 1989 *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference*. This was followed by the 1994 anthology, *The Essential Difference*, edited by Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed. Some of the claims I make here, in slightly different terms and with a different emphasis, were made beautifully by the editors and authors of that volume. Schor rightly points out that the political stakes of anti-essentialism have to do with feminist intellectuals distancing themselves from lesbian separatism. For a more recent, and very thoughtful history of the essentialism debates, analysis of what is at stake, and proposal for a Wittgensteinian way out, see Cressida Heyes *Line Drawings: Defining Women Through Feminist Practice*. My emphasis in this article is on the consequences of emphatic anti-essentialism for feminist

environmentalism, but the many other consequences of this dogmatic intellectual stance should be taken equally seriously.

¹⁸ This claim is certainly the most often cited from de Beauvoir's, *The Second Sex*.

¹⁹ See for example, Anzaldúa's and Moraga's, *This Bridge Called My Back*. Moraga writes, "Lesbian separatist utopia? No thank you, sisters. I can't prepare myself a revolutionary packet that makes no sense when I leave the white suburbs of Watertown, Massachusetts and take the T-line back to Roxbury (xiii)." See also "A Black Feminist Statement: the Combahee River Collective," in the same volume, and Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*. These early critical works did not question the category of woman *per se*, but rather separatist politics and the power of white women to define feminism that amounted to a false inclusion of "other" women in what seemed to them to be a white, middle-class, heterosexual category. Elizabeth Spelman took up these critiques in her *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* in 1988. She wrote against "a tendency in dominant Western feminist thought to posit an essential 'womanness' that all women have and share in common despite the racial, class, religious, ethnic, and cultural differences among us," and set out to "show that the notion of a generic 'woman' functions in feminist thought much the same way the notion of generic 'man' has functioned in Western philosophy: it obscures the heterogeneity of women (ix)."

²⁰ "What is woman? Panic, general alarm for an active defense. Frankly, it is a problem that the lesbians do not have because of a change of perspective, and it would be incorrect to say that lesbians associate, make love, live with women, for 'woman' has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems. Lesbians are not women (Wittig: 1980: 438)."

²¹ The editors and authors of the volume cited above, *The Essential Difference*, write this history in a slightly different way, focusing on the conflict between New French Feminism, Irigaray and those influenced by her work; and de Beauvoir and Marxist feminists in Europe. I am telling the story in the context of U.S. American feminism, which is engaged with but not reducible to, the debates in Europe. In the U.S. concrete struggles between women over issues of heterosexism and racism were of enormous influence in the essentialism debates. See note 26, below.

²² Cressida Heyes uses the term "principled anti-essentialism" to differentiate today's broad strokes anti-essentialism from the specific critiques that earlier feminists employed (2000).

²³ As Heyes notes, essentialism can be philosophically understood as a quest for purity, where the general concept is purified of any ontological association with its particular instantiations (2000). This fits well with early feminist

critiques of essentialism where efforts to critically engage the concept of woman from the diverse realities of women's experience resulted in important anti-essentialist positions. It is equally important to note however, that emphatic anti-essentialism ends by demanding another sort of purity, the theoretical purity of a feminism where every trace of essentialism has supposedly been eradicated (see Bordo, 1993 217, 243).

²⁴ See note 5, above. In the U.S. American academy, those feminists accused regularly and almost ritualistically of essentialism in its most reviled form included Adrienne Rich, Robin Morgan, Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon, and feminists who affirmed an ontological connection between women and nature, such as Mary Daly and Susan Griffin. This list, give or take a few names, appeared in article after article, and functioned as a kind of warning to other feminists. Association with "essentialism" would mean association with this group of feminists who academics believed to be discredited to the point of disgrace. Even now, papers at feminist conferences are full of off-hand remarks about Catharine MacKinnon, who seems to have inherited the spite formerly directed at the list of women above, and whose name is thrown out as the "marker" for essentialist, i.e. bad feminism. Catharine MacKinnon, an emphatic social constructionist if ever there was one, occupies this position in what can only be called a wildly ironic twist of the anti-essentialist logic. Not incidentally, all of these women are associated with 70's and 80's feminist activism, politicized lesbianism, separatism, and/or anti-pornography work--feminist positions that have thrown the norms of heterosexuality deeply into question. As Schor claims, this may be one of the keys to unlocking the political stakes of what I call emphatic anti-essentialism, and its vehemence.

²⁵ This is also when the term "cultural feminist" was created to stand in for the self-definition "radical feminist" by those opposed to radical feminist positions.

²⁶ See for example Alcoff 1988, Jane Flax 1987, Sawicki 1988 writes explicitly, "I... want to contribute to the movement beyond polarized debate, specifically by further developing the theoretical and practical implications of a *more adequate sexual politics*' in the work of Michel Foucault," in *Feminism and Foucault* (emphasis mine).

²⁷ See Roland Martin 1994 for an account of the "chilly research climate" created by the accusation of essentialism.

²⁸ Naomi Schor argues that "definitions are by definition, as it were, essentialist," and claims that anti-essentialists have essentialized essentialism by creating a context in which all sorts of essentialism are treated as equally heinous. She argues that the first task is to "de-essentialize essentialism (43)." Diana Fuss argues similarly that "there is no essence to essentialism... (historically, philosophically and politically) we can speak only of essentialisms (xii)."

²⁹ Feminists who have seemed to base their theoretical or political work on women's capacity for motherhood or

nurturance, or women's physical or biological characteristics, are the particular targets of this critique. Feminists as diverse as Carol Gilligan, Luce Irigaray, and Maria Mies have all been accused of this kind of essentialism.

³⁰ This should not be read to imply that the body will be lived everywhere and cross-culturally the same, only that it is lived everywhere. To speak of "the body" is already to speak in a certain cultural context which understands "body" in an individualizing framework that will not be intelligible in some different contexts.

³¹ Kittay writes, "Dependents require care. Neither the utterly helpless newborn who must be cared for in all aspects of her life nor a frail, but functioning, elderly person who needs only assistance to carry on with her life, will survive or thrive without another who meets her basic needs," and establishes with the first words of her introduction an "essential" and "universal" fact of human existence from which she builds her critique. "The dependency critique considers...the inescapable fact of human dependency and the ways in which such labor makes one vulnerable to domination (16)." The political implications are clear, "How a social order organizes care of these needs is a matter of social justice (1)," and similar political implications will be drawn when this concept is extended to dependence on the earth itself.

³² I don't mean my "prior" here to be read temporally, although in a certain developmental sense it can be, I mean it more in terms of "priority," first in the order of importance—where breathing, drinking, eating have a clear priority over theoretical activity.

³³ Here I am writing in agreement with ecofeminists Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, whose re-valuation of the realm of necessity is the centerpiece of their feminist call for a subsistence economy. In addition to the economic conclusions they draw, however, this insight is important philosophically. They call for a separation of the notions of "emancipation" and "freedom". Emancipation from the natural world has no part in their definition of freedom, which is freedom within the realm of necessity, not in contradistinction to it.