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Editorial: Feminism and Semiotics

By Barbara Godard

The addition of feminism to semiotics creates the “ampersand problem.” As supplement, feminism deconstructs the presuppositions of semiotics to expose a prior and unexamined binary opposition privileging the masculine of which women are the unnamed constituent part. Feminist critique has established the ideological dimensions of semiosis and so contributed to the elaboration of a critical, materialist semiotics and the development of cultural studies. In the process, the “sex/gender system” (Rubin 1975) has been shown to be an important signifying practice through which relations of power are enacted.

Feminists’ relations to semiotic theory are ambivalent. The theory affords a sophisticated understanding of women’s subordinate condition as cultural not natural. However, it must be transformed if it is to serve a feminist emancipatory project of constituting women as the subjects who know rather than the invisible objects of knowledge. While feminists have made important contributions to semiotic theory, these are frequently marginalized within mainstream semiotics as feminist theory not semiotics “proper.” The gap is marked explicitly in Umberto Eco’s (1976) refusal of Julia Kristeva’s (1973) “speaking subject.” Teresa de Lauretis (1984) considers this a “cross-roads” in semiotic research, split between a theory of meaning and a ghostly self-divided subject. De Lauretis follows Eco’s path to consider the social constraints rather than the pre-symbolic drives in the signifying process, so denaturalizing it as cultural materialist praxis. However, her subsequent extension of Eco’s work to theorize a materialist subject of semiosis has similarly been positioned on the opposite side of this disciplinary distinction which separates analysis of semiotic structures from subjective determinants. The emphasis on textuality partakes of semiotic theory’s focus on the sign and universals - “logocentrism” - which feminists have challenged in the name of the signifying network and the embodied subject to advance models of dynamic processes of signification within theories of complexity. The insights of feminism into power, difference and the signifying process of identification have contributed to the emergence of studies of racialized difference, postcolonial studies, lesbian and gay studies, and queer theory.

The characteristic feminist stance in semiotics has been to assess the limitations of and then creatively rewrite the master theories. Feminist interventions in semiotics have critiqued its structuralist tendencies for the positivism of their logico-mathematical paradigms taken for the real and advocated a critical semiotics that would recognize the discursive aspects of its paradigms as representations structuring the real. Feminist engagements with semiotics have contributed to, even as they have benefited from, poststructuralist theories of meaning as both polysemic - deferred in an infinite web of textuality - and ideological - stories told from an interested perspective. As the only “science” explicitly concerned with elaborating a theory of representation, asserts Kristeva (1969), semiotics becomes self-reflexively critical as well as critical of the representational models of other “sciences.” To be a critical theory, however, as Mieke Bal (1985) points out, semiotics needs a social theory and a theory of subjectivity with which to account for the dynamic interactions between the individual and social processes that are mediated transformatively in signification. As Terry Threadgold (1997) sums this up, there is no semiosis without subjectivity and no subjectivity without semiosis. In their “dialogic” relation to semiotic theory, to use the term of Bakhtin (1895-1975), feminist semioticians rework established concepts so as to transform their implicit misogyny and create the potential for what Luce Irigaray (1985a) terms “becoming woman,” a potential position for women as speaking subjects of theory. This entails a project of working within the interstices of semiotic theory to expose the masculine theorists’ elision of their own embodiment, which they displace onto women as Other in the constitution of a rational, self-sufficient subject. Feminist rewriting has made important contributions to semiotic theory in a number of areas including: subjectivity, intertextuality, the symptom, linguistic value, differential regimes of signification, theories of enunciation, representation, narrative, and non-linguistic signifying processes.

In the development of feminist approaches to semiotics, there have been two main phases, one emerging in France in the late 1960s which embraced the project of *Tel Quel* to combine the theories of De Saussure (1857-1913) with those of Marx (1818-1883) and Freud (1856-1939), and expansions on those theories and/or reworking of the theories of other key semiotic theoreticians which occurred in the English-speaking world in the 1980s. Julia Kristeva, the first major contributor to feminist critical reworkings of semiotic theory, introduced the category of the subject into semiosis. She rewrote Bakhtin’s concept of “dialogism,” an untotalizable and context-bound theory of meaning, into the concept of “intertextuality” or “ideologeme” (1967), then into “transposition” of texts (1984) to establish a dynamic model of signification that insists on its productivity to *make* meaning. The text carries out a redistributive function to bring about change and heterogeneity that constitutes a decentered “speaking subject” (1973). Meaning is located not in the isolated sign with its relation of signifier and signified, but is produced “intertextually” (a network of differentiations) through the interaction of verbal texts and the texts of society and history within the transformation of the “ideologeme” (value-laden utterance) as a “signifying practice” (1969). Although Kristeva insists after Bakhtin that there is “no general theory of language” (1977) and that a theory of metalanguage is always a

representation, an “ideologeme” (1969), her emphasis on textuality as dynamism rather than “dialogics” transforms Bakhtin’s materialist theory of signification. A “combinatory,” textual transformation involves the interaction of a “geno” (the “production of signification”) with a “pheno” text (the surface “communicative function”) (1969). Subsequently, she turns to psychoanalysis and posits the subject as text. Dynamism is reformulated as the interaction of the “semiotic” (the energy of the unconscious drive functions) with the “symbolic” (the rational structuring forces) (1984). The trace of the corporeal, of the rhythms and musicality of the drives and the body, may be located only through the structured syntax of the phenotext, but persists as negativity disrupting any singular or transparent meaning. The “semiotic” is most easily discerned in poetic and avant-garde texts and constitutes the “revolution” carried out “in poetic language” (1984). The poetic as transformative process of signification pulverizes and remakes meaning. As text, the subject remains divided between the “semiotic” (an unconscious archaic feminine principle) and the “symbolic” (rational name/law of the father). Subjectivity is thus constituted within language, the symbolic system of culture, as decentered.

In gendering the “semiotic” feminine and the “symbolic” masculine, Kristeva follows classic psychoanalytic models of signification and subjectivity. These are ordered by the Oedipal scenario and castration which must be surmounted by a series of substitutions to constitute a subject in language. Within this scenario, the feminine who lacks castration is relegated to absence as non-subject. In Kristeva’s model, the drives become the site of interaction and socialization as the paternal linguistic function channels them and inscribes its power on the body. Toril Moi (1985) finds Kristeva’s theory of the “subject-in-process” (subjectivity as continuous transformation) extremely productive for feminist theory to avoid the reductiveness of identity politics. However, De Lauretis (1984) and Terry Threadgold (1997) fault Kristeva’s primary focus on language and on high art texts and her neglect of a social theory. Elizabeth Grosz (1989) faults Kristeva for limiting the feminine to the maternal function and failing to theorize women’s desire more complexly. To counteract the Oedipal model of signification as loss, Kristeva gives considerable attention to how the feminine works invisibly through culture. She theorizes the “semiotic” as the “pre-symbolic” site of the maternal which persists as trace within the symbolic in an alternate form of meaning-making she terms “*signifiance*” (1984). Subsequently, she theorized a number of subject positions characterized by their incomplete separation of subject from object, with dispositions giving more place to the “semiotic,” and analyzed these signifying processes in a variety of literary and artistic texts (1982; 1989). Borderline states, they constitute sites of abnormality or “horror.” As “negativity,” they may function as sites of transference processes for the authors or readers of the texts. Though diffusing the feminine everywhere in the textual, Kristeva nonetheless positions women as the ineffable vanishing point and invisible prop supporting a masculinized norm of meaning and subjectivity.

However, in “Women’s Time” (1981), Kristeva briefly challenged the sacrificial logic of the symbolic contract founded in matricide. Against this scapegoating of women, she notes the force of the feminist movement organizing for change in the social contract. Yet she cautions against feminists’ development of a reverse discourse giving primacy to women that would merely perpetuate symbolic violence.

She posits instead a third person – her own theory – that internalizes gender opposition as self-differentiation which inserts a “cutting edge” into subjectivity. By multiplying the possible identifications for each person, it “pulverizes” any concept of a centered or authoritative subject. Motherhood is the model for Kristeva’s decentered subject. Maternity constitutes a process of distinction between self and other that is not absolute. The mother’s mixed feelings of connection with and separation from the child she carries in her body constitute an alternative to castration as a model of subject formation (1981). Abandoning European culture, Kristeva (1986) finds in China a model for feminine subjectivity as contradiction and heterogeneity. She highlights the figure of the mother’s “*jouissance*” (orgasmic mother) as an excess that confounds the hierarchical binary of the Oedipal scenario. Chinese double matrilineal and patrilineal kinship structures produce dual symbolic fields. The speaking subject in China, she argues, is articulated in a “dramatic combinatory” which challenges the principle of self-sufficient rationality of European subjectivity. This idealization of Chinese women constitutes an instance of Orientalist thinking. Kristeva diagnoses the current subordinate state of women in the social rather than transforming it, though she highlights the feminine as the sign of change.

Subsequent feminist semiotic theory follows Kristeva in taking as premise that subjectivity is an effect of signification and that theories are value-laden representations enacting gender differences. However, it differs from her in critiquing the Oedipal model of signification as loss and displacement posited by Freud and Lévi-Strauss (1949) as foundation of the distinction between nature and culture. In doing so, it makes important contributions to the theory of representation and narrative, as well as to concepts of meaning-making as action in the social. Important here is the work of Irigaray. Noting like Kristeva the omnipresence of the feminine body in the texts of philosophy, psychoanalysis and anthropology, she analyzes it as symptom of masculine hysteria whose somatization (bodily sign production) has been displaced unto the female body (1985a). This is a politicized critique following the reversal-displacement technique of a deconstructive reading. Irigaray exposes the missing masculine body of theory in order to postulate a different organization of the symbolic - a dual symbolic field - that would recognize sexual differences and constitute women as subjects for each other. Irigaray is concerned with radical alterity, with the “other of the other” not the “other of the same.” She seeks to make visible the relations of women as other with other women to replace the “a-woman” object who is the silent prop of a masculine subject (the “self-same”) (1985a). What dominates at present is a model of “hom(m)o[sociality]” (1985b) in which the feminine is appropriated by the masculine. Relations between masculine subjects are made possible by women as mute objects exchanged between men. The utopian order she posits would be founded on an exchange of signs between women under a contingent theory of value which posits signification as combination along the syntagmatic or metonymic axis (Jakobson 1957) in a complex series of interconnected differentiations (1985b). Her theoretical fiction figuring the feminine as heterogeneity is offered as an alternative to the disciplinary hypotheses of subjectivity and signification as lack.

Irigaray stages her theoretical intervention through what Gayatri Spivak (1987)

calls a “symptomatic reading” of the master texts of European philosophy to make visible the work of signification that has resulted in the exclusion of women. Reading between the lines of the texts from her position as non-subject, she attends to their repetitions and paradoxes as the trace of the subject’s inscription. Through her insertion of questions and parentheses into textual commentary, Irigaray disrupts their logic by emphasizing the textual rhetoric. This foregrounds the dilemma of deconstructing a metaphysics of identity, yet remaining caught in a masculinist ideology. She thus frames her theory as an utterance within a specific speech exchange, implicitly theorizing philosophy as the enunciation of a situated subject, a self-reflexive critical awareness lacking in Kristeva. Exposing the scandal of women’s lack as a masculine fantasy, Irigaray reworks the classic semiotic distinction between symptom and sign. Whereas the sign is considered to be an objective significate effect, the symptom is either indeterminate or subjective - what is apparently real. Corporeality is a slighted semiotic system. By rewriting Freud as a producer of symptoms rather than knowledge, Irigaray exposes and reverses the prior gendering of this distinction: women (hysterics) produce symptoms while men (theorists) produce signs or knowledge. All signs are shown to be symptoms of someone’s desire endlessly displaced. Meaning is always embodied meaning. Freud’s Oedipal theory as well as his theory of hysteria are exposed as fictions. They manifest the pervasiveness of a gender-based paradigm or fiction regulating cultural value in a distinction between production, linked to paternity and authority, and reproduction, linked to repetition and procreation.

This distinction also structures the discourse of philosophy as a separation of logic (signification) from bodies, as Irigaray demonstrates in the second part of her study in a deconstruction of the representational quality of truth. This is also a theorization of representation in the triple sense of the term; as an image of something, as a proxy for somebody in the political arena, and as a re-presentation or staging for an audience (addressee) in a specific instance of enunciation. Signification as enunciation is explored implicitly through the section headings and metaphors that frame Irigaray’s reading as a restaging for a different audience of Plato’s earlier “dramatic” dialogue, the allegory of the cave in *The Republic*, where he distinguishes philosophical truth (good) from artistic representation or (bad) *mimesis*. “Miming,” Irigaray (1985a) terms this second form of repetition and plays on the double meaning of “repetition” in French. It is not a bad “copy,” but a “rehearsal” leading to something different. Judith Butler (1990) succinctly summarizes Irigaray’s point. There is no authentic sexual identity: “woman” is an unstable term that gains its signification only as a relational term. It is “performatively produced” through the repetition of “coherent gender sequences” which order various attributes. The performative, a speech act, posits signification as a doing not an image, a doing whose meaning effect is context dependent.

Irigaray exposes these gender sequences at work in the very theorization of representation. Plato’s theory is entangled in a move to separate the intelligible from the sensible, reason from the body, that sexualizes and hierarchizes the distinction. Irigaray reads Plato through Derrida (1982), reversing the hierarchy to put signification before philosophy, rhetoric before logic. In the deconstructionist logic of paradox, she shows how Derrida too locates his philosophical project in this

mind/body, masculine/feminine, opposition. Through metaphor, the philosopher appropriates female reproduction in the name of creative insight. Irigaray emphasizes touch and contiguity in the cave over sight and distance outside. Contiguity, along with combination, are the activities occurring on the metonymic axis of signification (Saussure 1959, Jakobson 1971). Irigaray pursues the insights of Saussure into the production of linguistic meaning as value, not signification, analogous to economic exchange (an analogy used by Marx). Saussure posits a necessary intersection of metonymic and metaphoric axes in sciences of value. Irigaray rewrites Derrida to focus not on the dead (conventional) metaphor but on metonymy. This underscores Saussure's observation, that the value of any term is determined by its "surroundings" or context, to posit gender as a relative term or social value. Her emphasis on the metonymic axis of endless combination along a chain of differentiations connects verbal and non-verbal signifiers in an expanding network (Godard 1991). Signification is multiply determined. Not only corporeal signs, but those of the material context of enunciation, are linked along this axis which focuses on production over final meaning. In attempting to reverse the dualism of mind and body, Irigaray has converted a politics of language into a political poetics of the body. Anglo-American feminist critics have faulted Irigaray for "essentialism" (Moi 1985). They have overlooked her theorization of the female body as an effect of semiosis reproduced in disciplinary discourses.

This model of embodied signification challenges the foundation of structuralist semiotics. Lévi-Strauss's (1949) theory of the production of meaning and culture, of narrative structures and kinship systems, through the exchange of women is posited as foundational to semiotics by Eco (1976). However, Simone de Beauvoir (1952) noted the lack of reciprocity in this exchange which constituted a singular masculine subject through sexual difference. Gail Rubin (1975) also noted the entanglement of this theory of culture in the establishment of the "sex/gender system." Woman, as sign, is paradoxically both nature and culture, a silent contradiction underpinning discursive systems. The scandal of this theory ordered by the Oedipal narrative is not incest, Irigaray demonstrates, but "hom(m)o[sociality]". While Derrida (1978) challenges the concept of system by deconstructing the instability of incest as both the sign of nature and a cultural construct, Irigaray (1985a) challenges the gendered binaries of Lévi-Strauss's semiotic square by focusing on its unstated term - homosexuality. Signification is not bound up in castration and loss, but rather in excess, the excess of the same difference - the same which is different - in the relation between two men consolidated by the exchange of women. What would it mean if women as "the goods" to be exchanged refused to come to market and started exchanging amongst themselves? This could only happen, Irigaray argues (1985b), if the full force of the heterogeneity of meaning were unleashed. A "mechanics of fluids," or economy of limitless combinations along the metonymic chain of signification, might be such a model of radical differentiation, a heterogeneity of economies of desire and meaning. This would displace the cycle of reproduction and production under the ruling "mechanics of solids" valorizing a singular (phallic) meaning. Rather than expand on the analogy of "libidinal economy" (Lyotard 1993) to develop a social theory, in more recent work Irigaray has focused on the linguistic constitution of

subjectivity with little attention to social context (1987, 1990). Drawing on Benveniste's (1966) theorization of enunciation (Stephenson 1989), she has engaged in empirical analysis to demonstrate that women use convoluted sentence structures so as to avoid producing a feminine speaking subject. The absence of any attention to the addressee in the enunciation to develop a more context-bound theory of enunciation, and the failure to take into account the cross-cultural dimensions of the analysis carried out in a number of countries and languages, severely limit the conclusions of this work. It marks a significant shift away from the theoretical contributions of Irigaray's earlier work on the complex non-verbal dimensions of signification as social action and on the heterogeneity of regimes of enunciation which would produce women as knowing subjects.

Hélène Cixous (1986) likewise fails to develop the materialist insights of her work into an expanded social theory. She too advances economic, linguistic and subjective systems as mutual determinants in the signifying network. To challenge the Oedipal economy of scarcity and lack which produces binaries, she turns instead to the model of the gift or potlatch and an economy of excess and unending circulation, derived from Marcel Mauss's (1969) analysis of Amerindian cultures. Her reworking of the myth of Medusa to transform her from a figuration of castration into one of abundance, of laughter not matricide, constitutes the feminine as sign of rupture and transformation (1981). *Poesis* or meaning-making is how Cixous terms this negativity which dismantles established order. She later rejected the label of "theorist" for that of playwright. Reading this "inner theatre" of subjectivity and signification in light of her venture into "world theatre" highlights the performative dimension of the subject and her focus on the instance of enunciation. Though the audience or addressee is important in theatrical semiosis, Cixous does not analyze this facet of signification, focusing on the speaking or writing subject. Nor does she go beyond an implicit socio-cultural model of signification in her countering of one anthropological model of the economy of signs by another. The concluding dialogue with Catherine Clément stages a quarrel within feminism between historicized class struggle and language in which Cixous's plea for *poesis* resonates.

Further work in feminist semiotics develops the theory of enunciation to bridge this opposition. Kaja Silverman (1983) makes the subject and discourse central to semiotics by reworking Benveniste's (1966) theory of enunciation which relates meaning to the moment of speech, especially his important concept of the "shifter" (*deixis*) and the reciprocal relation of subject and addressee. She posits three positions for the subject in each utterance, that of "speaking subject" (enunciation) and of "subject of speech" (*énoncé*), as well as the "spoken subject" or addressee. Combining this with Lacan's theory of suture and phantasy, she develops a theory of spectatorship for film and of reading for literature that accounts for the ways in which the you of address is brought to identify with, and take up a position of subject in alignment with, these representational forms. This theory of identification demonstrates the means by which subjects are constituted by signification as socially differentiated. She subsequently extended this work to theorize masculinity and visual pleasure (1992).

Gayatri Spivak has further developed a theory of enunciation to take into

account more complex social identifications of subjects, especially racialized relations within the framework of imperialism, and to articulate the dynamics of power. She posits women not as constituted in the family romance as excess, as the *outside* of social relations of power, but as constituted as women through economic, legal and political structures. Like Irigaray, she deconstructs Derrida's deconstruction which reproduces phallogentrism in taking woman as figure of displacement. She too advocates "fabricat[ing] strategic 'misreadings'" or "useful and scrupulous fake readings" to propose alternate fictions of the real to received misogynist theories (1983). Significantly, she deconstructs feminism's "truth of global sisterhood" to expose its metaphorical constitution of a feminine plural, a we of feminism, that overlooks the power differentials dividing women on grounds of class, race and nation (1986). Her focus is on the other of the other woman. This entails a reading of archival documents of imperialism in a reversal-displacement to expose the complexities and contradictions of the formation of multiply divided racialized and sexualized subjectivities (1985). These readings engage more with the fabrications of representations of historical reality than with language as signifying system. Spivak accounts for her fuller treatment of the socio-political context of enunciation, in both the need to consider power relations in the production of the investigating subject's enunciation, and to attend to the micro-political in the everyday. Not divorced from consciousness, the entire socius is a "continuous sign-chain" (1985). Language, she writes, "is not everything," only the place where the subject's boundaries unravel (1993). She posits a complex model of language as "rhetoric, logic and silence." Rhetoric disrupts the logical system of a language or propositional "content." Rhetoric orients speaking toward an addressee in the enunciative context of a social practice. Encountering silence as "the founding violence at work in rhetoric," she finds not the languageness of language, like Derrida, but the social reasonableness in which language is immersed as politicized utterance, sociality which determines what is sayable and receivable. The possibility for social action lies in the dynamics of breaking and rethinking the signifying chain.

Teresa de Lauretis's (1984) dialogue with Umberto Eco (1976) also posits semiosis as a dynamic and infinite reworking - within cultural practice, not language, however. She reformulates Eco's questions and gives different replies that redefine the field of semiotics by introducing a gendered subject of semiosis. Like Eco, though, she understands semiosis as human labour whose significate effects are a doing in the social. Most significantly, De Lauretis formulates a theoretical response to the contradiction of "double identification" at the heart of feminist theories. How to develop a speaking position for women as subjects when woman is both excluded from discourse and confined within it? Challenging semiotics from within by reworking its premises founded in the exchange of women (Lévi-Strauss 1949; Eco 1976; De Lauretis 1984), she elaborates a complex model of semiosis involving the "multileveled interaction of many heterogeneous sign vehicles." Taking from Eco an understanding of the process of semiosis as "invention," a making of new meanings in which the pertinent features are "mapped" from one material medium to another to transform both the representation and perception of reality, she assigns pertinency to different features.

This is precisely the task of (feminist) theory, “to construct the terms of another frame of reference.” Perception involves not just cognition, as Eco postulated in his rewriting of Peirce’s “interpretant,” but also memory, desire, pain, labour. Perception, indeed, is a “signifying practice.” Semiosis is not natural but socially and historically “overdetermined.” Nor can it ever be separated from a process of enunciation that involves the complete history of the speaking subject. The complexity of these perceptive operations of meaning making as they interact with the social assures the production of difference. Such heterogeneity includes both the modalities of sign-production and the relations of address in speech acts. So “imaging,” as De Lauretis terms this theory of meaning as production, can be reduced neither to the linguistic nor the iconic, but exceeds them and involves other modes of perception/signification. So too, the positions of address are not fixed definitively, but are produced and defined temporarily within social formations. Though these have been preeminently patriarchal, the dominant ideology does not have a monopoly, but is only one possible set of codes among many. Pertinence both individual and social is critical here to construct the frame for resistance. A sign is significant for a subject in a mental or muscular effort only within the “subject’s experience of a social practice.” Feminism as a social practice could change as well as reproduce meanings and codes to produce a position for a woman subject of semiosis.

De Lauretis’s return to Peirce through Eco also constitutes a rewriting of much feminist semiotic theory whose positions are inflected by Lacanian psychoanalysis. She retains from film theory its theorization of enunciation as an address that constitutes the spectator as spoken subject. However, she challenges its psychoanalytic model of signification, with its fixed binary positions of enunciation supported by an unexamined presupposition of sexual difference, so as to posit the potential for social change. This model is founded on the Oedipal narrative. De Lauretis responds to the contradiction that woman is sign of both nature and culture with the call to make visible the nature of this narrative. The task of theoretical feminism and cultural practices such as film is to articulate the relation of the female subject to representation. Rather than destroying it, narrative should be reworked in a number of variations that involve a multiplicity of speaking positions and modes of address that will open up the “contradictory but not impossible space of female desire.” While formulating the potential of heterogeneity, of stories, De Lauretis engages in history, examining the history of narrative theory entangled with that of semiotic theory. She notes the legacy of Lévi-Strauss’s model of narrative transformation in the Oedipal story of masculine desire in narratology and semiotics as well as in psychoanalysis. Unlike Irigaray, De Lauretis considers the performative effects of narrative as enunciation for the addressee in whom it produces changes. Embodiment is not relegated to some archaic and pre-symbolic site, as in Kristeva’s theory, but is eminently social and historical. De Lauretis (1987) will later call narrative a “technology of gender” establishing relations of address to interpellate subjects and habituate them to certain practices. To produce a change in habit, new relations of address are necessary, more complex and multivalent than Oedipal lack.

De Lauretis’s theory differs from other feminist approaches in moving beyond a

critical semiotics to outline a revisionary theory for a female subject of semiosis. Her major contribution to semiotic and feminist theory is to posit a model of experience as semiosis. Experience is multidimensional and interactive, not fixed in a mind/body dualism. As example, she offers Virginia Woolf's narrative of her encounter with the beadle as she walked across the Oxford grass. Her "instinct" that she was both a woman and out of place is in fact a "kind of knowledge internalized from daily, secular repetition of actions, impressions and meanings" whose effect has been accepted as necessary. Subjectivity is produced by such personal "engagement in practices, discourses and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning and affect) to the world." Gender, a learned habitual mode of behaving, is thus the effect of both representation and self-representation. De Lauretis's account of the significate processes of the "interpretant" in a chain of semiotic mediations positions Peirce against Eco. Peirce's tripartite model of "proper significate effects" includes the emotional interpretant, the energetic interpretant involving muscular or mental action, and "habit-change," produced through the first two and modifying dispositions to act. This last is the logical interpretant, a "living logical conclusion that is habit," the result of the social production of meaning. Eco, however, in a "surgical operation" excised the subjective component of semiosis from Peirce's model to limit it to the publicly "testable and describable" interpretants. In De Lauretis's account, meaning and consciousness are worked through the body. It has no ontological status prior to language, as in the psychoanalytic model of signification, but is the effect of culturally pertinent perceptions/significations. What is necessary for the constitution of a feminist subject of semiosis is a change in the terms of pertinence. Such a change in perception, De Lauretis suggests, may be brought about through the feminist consciousness-raising group which, through a kind of "imaging," offers a different frame of reference to resignify the learned habituated behaviours of subordinate femininity as social and hence changeable. This reframing in the politicized context of feminism occurs not outside but inside the infinite signifying chain to produce new affect, value and meaning. De Lauretis's formulation of semiosis both displaces the primacy accorded consciousness and language in meaning making, to make a place for visual signifying practices, especially film. Beginning with the socio-cultural, it also prepares the way for cultural studies which analyzes the signifying practices of the everyday.

Two other approaches to semiotics should be noted, the one focused on narratology, the other on the historicized signifying practices of the everyday. Mieke Bal (1985) examines narrative semiotics in light of the critique generated by a meta-semiotic that attempts to distinguish between models as explanations of readings and models as sets of implicit instructions or presuppositions followed by adherents to a theoretical convention. Narratology is caught in an impasse, not having become such a transmissible tool available for critique. Drawing on Habermas's "critical theory," and Peirce's discursive account of cognitive processes in the functioning of the "interpretant" in a chain of semiotic mediations, Bal argues for "focalization" in narrative as constitutive of a non-humanist subject of semiosis. Narrative here becomes a technology in De Lauretis's sense for producing social subjects. Bal then uses Greimas's "semiotic square" (1983), developed from

Lévi-Strauss's (1949) model of narrative transformation in the Oedipal myth and kinship systems, against the grain as a tool or interpretive paradigm. Her analysis of narratives in the Judeo-Christian Bible which relate the murder of women performs a critique of the misogyny of this foundational text of Western culture. This stages a double reversal or "double exposure," making use of a model grounded in a myth of one patriarchal culture to critique the patriarchal practices in other cultures' mythic texts. Bal's is a critical not an emancipatory use of narratology to expose the social mediation of women's subordinate condition. Subsequently Bal (1996) turned from linguistic to visual semiotics to consider their specific exchange within the museum's semiosis of "display" or "showing off," comparable to the semiosis of "imaging" in film. The subject who speaks through this sign system is cultural process, racializing, gendering and otherwise making distinctions.

Terry Threadgold (1997) too is concerned with semiotics as critical "meta-language." Expanding on De Lauretis's theorizing of "imaging" or representation as "interpretant," she insists on *poesis* or "poetics" as meaning-making. Semiotic theories are instances of *poesis*, and hence interested stories shaping the real to be reworked to feminist ends. In this argument she extends the materialist dimensions of De Lauretis's concept of experience as semiotized "habit," by means of sociologists' theorizing of the meaning-making practices of power in the lived embodied relations of the social, particularly Bourdieu's (1980) concept of "habitus." De Certeau's (1984) concept of practice as story, of history as interested story, is combined with Dorothy Smith's (1987) theorization of the gendered practices of ruling in the everyday. Threadgold synthesizes these theories of embodiment and its relation to consciousness, of differential access to economic, cultural and symbolic capital, of the relations of power and discursively constituted subjectivity. Then she reads a signifying chain of intertextual reworkings of written and oral narratives over a century. These relate the Governor murders in Australia in a variety of ways productive of class, race and gender relations. This more fully articulated cultural and social theory is used to assess the limits and rewrite the social semiotics of M.A.K. Halliday (1978). His theory of the social is an upward projection from language to context and social system, despite its origins in social anthropology. In his emphasis on structures and institutions, the materiality of bodies and spatial contexts lingers only as trace. Against this, Threadgold draws on social theories postulating structures of feeling and action as states of the body, not the mind. Against the "feminine" of psychoanalytic universals, she invokes Eco's and De Lauretis's theories of the "labouring subject of semiosis" to account for historicized and differentiated subjects. Bodily marked as gendered, classed or raced by previous semiotic encounters, this subject would change the space of a single semiotic privileging the powerful. "Infinite semiosis" or intertextuality - telling many stories at once - is a way of telling complexly or differently. This rewriting makes a place for embodied women subjects of semiosis producing change not exchange. The project of feminist semiotics to theorize non-verbal semiosis and heterogeneity is displayed here as a meta-semiotic critique of a paradigmatic mind/body dichotomy operating in semiotics and other theories to exclude women's differentiated experiences of the social.

An important moment in the diffusion of feminist semiotic theory was the 1987

International Summer Institute for Semiotic and Structural Studies which brought to Toronto professors Teresa de Lauretis, Luce Irigaray, Kaja Silverman, Terry Threadgold and others. Semiotic theory remains influential in feminist poststructuralist approaches, though the specific terminology and conceptual rigour of these pioneering theorists are rare. Perhaps their most significant contribution is to have developed semiotics as a critical theory and semiosis as social action producing change. They have attempted to transform the terms of cultural transmission by making visible the absent masculine body in modernity's theories of the rational subject and the complicitous relations of the subject who knows to the object of knowledge.

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