

**"Contesting the Power of Categories:
Discourse, Experience, and Feminist
Resistance"**

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"...The whole thing comes to look very homogeneous. Power is everywhere, and so ultimately nowhere." (Nancy Hartsock)

"Perhaps there is after all a certain master-narrative implicit in our post-modern vision of things -- a narrative constituted by the denial of master-narratives, a master-narrative organized around the emphasis on multiplicity, openendedness, fracture, fluidity, indeterminacy." (Fernando Coronil, CSST final comments, Oct 1990)

"How can we combine a postmodern incredulity towards metanarratives with the social-critical power of feminism?" (Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson)

"The challenge for those of us who are convinced both that real historical women do exist and share certain experiences and that deconstruction's demystification of presence makes theoretical sense is to work out some way to think both women and 'woman.' It isn't an easy task." (Mary Poovey)

"The first act of a feminist critic is 'to become a resisting rather than an assenting reader..." (Judith Fetterley as cited by Jonathan Culler)

"...It seems to me grotesque to insist on the notion that the text is shaped by everything but the lived reality of the people the text claims to represent...The anthropologist and the historian are charged with representing the lives of living or once-living people, and as we attempt to push these people into the molds of our texts, they push back. The final text is a product of our pushing and their back-pushing, and no text, however 'dominant,' lacks the traces of this counterforce." (Sherry Ortner, CSST Conference on the Historic Turn in the Social Sciences, October 1990.)

"To deny the unity and stability of identity is one thing. The epistemological fantasy of becoming multiplicity -- the dream of limitless multiple embodiments, allowing one to dance from place to place and self to self -- is another. What sort of body is it that is free to change its shape and location at will, that can become anyone and travel everywhere? 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)

I. Feminism and Post-Structuralism: Thinking Across the Disciplines

This paper begins with a fantasy, a vision of a paper that might be written in the tradition of Walter Benjamin's Passagenwerk, a paper that juxtaposes and displays quotations, that dislodges them from their "context" and offers/creates a collage of commentary on both the power of categories (modern and post-modern) and on the power of resistance. Indeed, the above quotations provide a framework, or perhaps merely the "buzz words" for my discussion here. One of the tasks of my paper is to explore the ongoing "encounter"¹ between feminism and post-structuralist theory, in particular feminist challenges to the new master-narrative of multiplicity, fluidity, and indeterminacy.² This exploration is embedded in historical analysis, in moments of my own historical writing, in my attempts to come to terms with the "linguistic turn" in history, to re-think and re-write the contested terms: experience, identity, subjectivity, resistance.

The encounter between feminism and post-structuralism comprises a central chapter in the history of women's studies and women's history during the last decade, in the ongoing transformation from women's studies and women's history to gender studies and gender history. However, it is important to consider the possibility that women's history might well have become gender history in the absence of such an encounter, to explore the ways in which this transformation might have originated in contradictions inherent in "women's studies" or "women's history." In a sense, gender history is what happened when we tried to integrate women into social history and found our narratives destabilized, our concepts, chronologies, and geographic boundaries transformed;³ it is what happened when we were forced to theorize our findings.

In fact, it seems to me that we are often rather single-minded when we (social historians) talk about the "linguistic turn" in terms of (mainly) Foucault, Lacan and/or Derrida. This overlooks the ways in which feminist historiography had already begun to challenge the historical canon and historical methods and perhaps to prepare the ground for the "linguistic turn" before Foucault, Lacan or Derrida became fashionable. Feminist history, in its rejection of biological essentialism as an explanation of gender inequalities, discovered the power of language, of discourses, to "socially construct" these inequalities and anchor them in social practices and institutions. Together, if not hand-in-hand, feminist and post-structuralist critiques of historical "master-narratives" rendered "what was previously deemed central" as fragmented -- the state, for example -- and sought to understand that "center" in terms of its margins and peripheries.⁴

Thus, I am arguing not only that feminism is central in our discussion of the genealogy of the linguistic turn in history, but that feminist studies is a field in which the linguistic turn "was most sharply registered," a field in which the epistemological crisis has been particularly acute.⁵ One only needs to peruse recent issues of Signs, Feminist Studies, or Gender and History or to

survey the shelves of a good bookstore to sample the many interesting journal articles and essay collections by feminist scholars on the relationship of feminism to post-modernism or post-structuralism. Indeed, it seems to me that feminist scholars across the disciplines are grappling with post-structuralism in particular ways, are attempting to rewrite, resist, and/or go beyond post-structuralism, to lead the way out of the current epistemological uncertainty towards a new kind of resolution.

Why are the stakes of debates about post-structuralism particularly high, the debates especially vitriolic, in the fields of feminist studies/history? In my view it is because the primary task of feminist history until recently has been to constitute the female subject, to render her visible in history. Furthermore, many feminist scholars, who have more than a historical or academic interest in "constituting the female subject," seek to interrogate and evaluate "theory" in terms of its implications for a "feminist practice."⁶

On the one hand, the post-structuralist "decentering" of the (autonomous western white male) subject and "abandoning [of] the belief in essential subjectivity" initially appeared to be an emancipatory development for feminist scholars.⁷ The act of "decentering," the notion of a subjectivity "as a site of disunity and conflict," appeared to open up a space for the constitution of female subjects/actors⁸ in the course of exposing and rectifying the (historical) exclusion of women and the "identification of human with masculine."⁹ The relentless breaking apart of "binary oppositions" and the uncovering of their "violent hierarchies" and "orders of subordination"¹⁰ has helped to "reveal the figurative nature of all ideology..." and to expose "the artifice inherent in such categories as 'nature' and gender," and (I might add) woman, man, class, and citizen.¹¹

The emancipatory moment in the feminist reception of post-structuralism has been overshadowed, however, by its critiques of feminist essentialism and by its refusal to replace the heretofore dominant white male subject-individual-citizen by a female subject. As feminists began to uncover the ways in which their own narratives were "reductionist, totalizing, ...valorizing of gender difference, unconsciously racist and elitist," "a new drift within feminism," became noticeable, "a new scepticism about the use of gender as an analytical category."¹² Feminist critics of modernism, Susan Bordo argues, rejected the "view from nowhere" (purported objectivity) only to embrace a fantasy she terms "a dream of everywhere," a fantasy of "attaining an epistemological perspective free of the locatedness and limitations of embodied existence."¹³ Indeed, Bordo cautions that in "shifting the focus ...from practical contexts to questions of adequate theory," 'postmodern feminism' threatens to "harness and tame the visionary and critical energy of feminism as a movement of cultural resistance and transformation."¹⁴ Other opponents of a feminist post-modernism seek to defend the integrity of the female subject, still in the process of self-constitution. Political scientist Nancy Hartsock warns us that "postmodernism represents a dangerous approach for any marginalized group to adopt," since it undermines the efforts of those "who have not been allowed to make their own history" to name themselves, to "act as subjects rather than objects of history."¹⁵

Other feminist scholars, by contrast, engage post-structuralist theory in a critical and differentiated manner, proposing, for example, to "rewrite deconstruction" (Mary Poovey) or to formulate a feminist post-modernist theory (Linda Nicholson and Nancy Fraser, Chris Weedon). Implicit in these proposals is the recognition that feminism will be profoundly transformed by its encounter with post-structuralism. Mary Poovey, for example, outlines the positive contributions deconstruction (as one variant of post-structuralism) makes to a feminism that "is interested not only in the idea of 'woman,' but also in the concrete, class- and race-specific facts of historical women." But she also calls upon feminists to rewrite deconstruction, to endow it with tools for analyzing specificity, to enrich it with a model of change, to historicize it, and finally to "deploy" deconstruction upon itself.¹⁶ Nicholson and Fraser critique the "anemic" conceptions of social criticism in post-modernist theory and fashion a feminist post-modernist theory that will be useful to "contemporary feminist political practice."¹⁷ Nonetheless, the feminist post-modernism they envision proposes to "dispense with the idea of a subject of history" and to replace "unitary notions of woman and feminine gender identity with plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity, treating gender as one relevant strand among others, attending also to class, race, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation."¹⁸

What emerges clearly from my survey of these debates is that very few feminist scholars seem prepared to embrace post-structuralist theory (Foucault, Derrida or Lacan) without first engaging in a critical Auseinandersetzung with it (literally, a taking apart of the theory.) This process of taking the theory apart or rewriting, it seems to me, has produced a number of important questions, which make the task of sorting through these debates well worthwhile. One central question pertains to the relationship between discourse (or discursive construction) and subjectivity. Even those who would agree that subjectivity is "discursively constituted" seek to understand "how subjects mediate (i.e. transform) those discourses in their everyday lives, or how subjects see themselves to the extent that they are not entirely identified with those institutions."¹⁹ What determines the "forms of subjectivity immediately open to any individual on the basis of gender, race, class, age and cultural background?"²⁰

Assuming that subjectivities and identities are "sites of struggle," unstable and constantly changing, how do we delineate the discursive aspects of that struggle from the moments of human agency/action? Furthermore, if deconstruction insists on the continued importance of "non-discursive forces," how do we define these forces?²¹ Where do discourses begin and end? The problem of agency appears (implicitly) again and again in related questions about post-structuralist notions of power, about the power to resist discourses and discursive constructions. Nancy Hartsock argues that despite Foucault's insistence that "wherever there is power, there is resistance," in his schema resistance is actually deprived of the power to transform systems or institutions.²² Instead, she argues, "Foucault suggests that if our resistance succeeded, we would simply be changing one discursive identity for another and in the process create new oppressions."²³ In Hartsock's reading of

Foucault, "subjects become obliterated or, rather, recreated as passive objects, a world in which passivity or refusal represent the only possible choices..." Moreover, "...external forces such as power are given access even to the body and thus are the forces which constitute the subject as a kind of effect."²⁴ To what extent, then, can individual subjects resist or transform hegemonic discourses, or produce new meanings from the "conflicts and contradictions between existing discourses."²⁵

While questions like these are posed frequently these days, it seems to me that few scholars are bold enough to try to answer them. This is precisely the contribution of "feminist post-modernists" whose view their task of "rewriting" as an attempt to come to terms with these difficult issues. Chris Weedon, for example, offers an interesting and thoughtful reflection on the relationship between subjectivity and discourse and the place of resistance therein:

In the battle for subjectivity and the supremacy of particular versions of meaning of which it is a part, the individual is not merely the passive site of discursive struggle. The individual who has a memory and an already discursively constituted sense of identity may resist particular interpellations or produce new versions of meaning from the conflicts and contradictions between existing discourses.²⁶

II. Discourse, Experience and (Feminist) Resistance: Re-reading and Re-writing Histories

The above-mentioned project of "rewriting" post-structuralism stands in stark contrast with the work of historian Joan Wallach Scott. While Scott may, in fact, perform a kind of "rewriting" of Foucault and Derrida in terms of key historical concepts and categories, her engagement with them appears to have been a mainly positive one. Scott has been the most prominent and visible women's historian (in the United States) to make explicit use of post-structuralist theory. Her path-breaking essay, "Gender: An Useful Category of Historical Analysis" (1986) and her essay collection, Gender and the Politics of History (1988) represented a three-fold challenge to the field of history 1) by marking and theorizing the shift from women's history to gender history that had been underway for some time and calling upon "mainstream" historians to consider gender as a category of historical analysis; 2) by introducing post-structuralist theory into women's history/gender history and reinterpreting central categories of analysis; and 3) by placing gender at the heart of the ongoing discussions in history about post-structuralist theories (mainly Foucault's). Three years after the publication of Gender and the Politics of History, Scott's turn to post-structuralism continues to stimulate controversy within (and beyond) the ranks of feminist historians.²⁷ These debates have centered, predictably, around several of the fundamental concepts in social history and feminist history, especially around the notions of a female subject (or female subjectivity); of language and discourse and their power to constitute subjects: of experience, agency, and identity.

I choose to focus on Scott not only because her work is of great relevance to mine, but also because she has posed important and exciting questions that I think feminist historians should attempt to answer. Although many seem to hope that the destabilizing impact of Scott's essays will fade away with time, in my estimation there is no turning back to the unproblematic use of concepts like class or experience (to name two which she addresses directly). At the same time, however, I am reluctant to accept the finality or one-dimensionality of "the "post-structuralist axiom of the 1980s... the 'discursive character of all practices,'" or to remain for a prolonged period on (what Geoff Eley termed) this "up-escalator with no way down."²⁸ My (perhaps pragmatic solution) is to turn to "history," to attempt to formulate a response to Scott's challenge that is historically specific, that is grounded in my reading of historical sources. This approach is ultimately an interrogation of both Scott's work and my own: it submits both to a re-reading and possibly even to a re-writing. Here I offer abbreviated (and admittedly selective) readings of two of Scott's essays and of two moments in my own work.

1. Reading Joan Scott on Experience, Discourse, and Resistance

Scott's recent essay, "The Evidence of Experience," challenges the "authority of experience,...the appeal to experience as uncontestable evidence and as an originary point of explanation."²⁹ She is interested not only in interrogating the "experience" of the historical subject but also that of "the historian who learns to see and illuminate the lives of those others in his or her texts."³⁰ The starting point of her discussion is Samuel Delany's The Motion of Light in Water, "a magnificent autobiographical meditation...that dramatically raises the problem of writing the history of difference, the history, that is, of the designation of 'other....'"³¹ Scott's aim here is to critique Delany's focus on his own experience as the basis of knowledge, of identity formation, of political power: he attributes his "...first direct sense of political power," for example, to "'the apprehension of massed bodies'" in a gay bathhouse.³² In her view, his mission of documenting the "lives of those omitted or overlooked in accounts of the past" -- in this case black, gay men -- is one that Delany shares with many historians (especially women's historians).³³ Delany's text seeks to "document the existence of those institutions [gay bathhouses] in all their variety and multiplicity, to write about and thus to render historical what has hitherto been hidden from history."³⁴ Similarly, she argues that Delany's tendency to portray knowledge as "gained through vision" and writing as "reproduction, transmission -- the communication of knowledge gained through (visual, visceral) experience" -- as emblematic of much historical research and writing.³⁵

In Scott's schema, the "project of making experience visible" obscures and in fact, precludes the central task of analyzing "...how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world."³⁶ In her analysis, the "evidence of experience" obscures "the workings of the ideological system itself [and] its categories of representation (homosexual/heterosexual, man/woman, black/white, as fixed immutable identities)...."³⁷ Here Scott constructs as oppositional, rather

than complementary historical tasks, the analysis of the "experience" and/or identity of "difference" and the exploration of how difference was constituted in the first place.

Scott's call to historicize the identities of those whose experience is being documented, instead of taking them as self-evident, is well taken.³⁸ This means that instead of taking male or female roles, feminine or masculine gender identities as givens or starting points of a specific historical project, we must first analyze how, when, and why these roles or identities were formed (or "constructed"). In one sense, however, it seems to me that much of the recent work in the history of women and gender already does this, even if it is not always highly theorized. (Family Fortunes by Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall is one good example). In another sense, Scott's agenda might signal a whole new kind of historical investigation, the history of homosexuality instead of homosexuals; of "blackness," instead of blacks; of the construction of the feminine instead of women. It is the "instead of" that concerns me and admittedly, Scott does not explicitly posit this. But it is implicit in the opposition she establishes between the history of how difference was constituted and how it was experienced (and by extension, how identities were formed based on that experience), in her assertion that the exploration of the latter precludes the former (and this assertion clearly applies not just to Delany's text).

By now it is evident that Scott rejects the notion that historians can capture experience in the sense of "lived reality," or "raw events" and many of us might agree with her on this point. She concedes, nonetheless, that "experience is not a word we can do without."³⁹ The closest Scott comes to a definition of "experience," however, is that it is a "linguistic event," that is, "it doesn't happen outside established meanings."⁴⁰ Scott asserts that "Experience is a subject's history; language is the site of history's enactment [and] historical explanation cannot, therefore, separate the two."⁴¹ It might be relatively easy to agree with some of these assertions, namely that "experience doesn't happen outside established meanings," but that does not necessarily mean that it is a (solely, or mainly) a "linguistic event." Likewise, many historians would, in the meantime, agree that historical analysis should not separate language and experience, but few would agree with Scott's contention that language or discourses "position subjects and produce their experiences."⁴²

In my view, few historians, even those very positively inclined towards post-structuralist theory, will find it easy to accept Scott's reading of "experience" (and I do not wish to imply that Scott expects us to do so). One reason for this is that the terms she critiques -- experience in this case -- are seldom redefined: we know what experience is not, but not what it might be. Another is that Scott's rhetorical strategy is often to allow concepts more or less to flow into one another, so that it is difficult to disentangle them from one another (language from discourse) or to discern where one begins and the other ends: "experience," for example, is (a subject's) history; "language is the site of history's enactment;" "discourses produce experiences;" subjects are constituted "through experience." Sometimes her arguments appear to

follow an almost circular path; at other times they work to establish new (binary) oppositions. In both cases it is difficult to imagine what these postulates might mean in concrete historical settings. This is where Geoff's metaphor about the up-escalator seems particularly apt.

Yet it seems to me that we can resist the pull of the up-escalator and transcend the strictures of both circularity and opposition by doing the work of concretizing and redefining concepts ourselves, by fulfilling the task of rewriting (concretizing, historizing) post-structuralist theory and (theorizing) specific historical moments. If we agree with Scott that we cannot uncover "lived reality," then we must think about what we can discover in various historical sources. What kinds of "experience" might we be able to imagine based on those texts? Bill Sewell has attempted to do this by differentiating between texts and "human social worlds" which, he argues, are structured by more than linguistic conventions, and they are also structured by linguistic conventions in different ways than texts."⁴³ Sherry Ortner has also pointed to an important distinction between literary and historical/ethnographic texts: while "there is nobody on the other side of the novelist's text," anthropologists and historians "are charged with representing the lives of living or once-living people and as we attempt to push these people into the molds of our texts, they push back."⁴⁴ Sewell engages "experience" in order to redefine it as "the linguistically shaped process of weighing and assigning meaning to events as they happen," a process that is embedded in the "cultural understandings and linguistic capacities" of historical subjects.⁴⁵ Experience might well consist of more than "assigning meaning," but historians certainly have greater access to the ways historical subjects assigned meaning about "raw events" than to those events themselves. Furthermore, emphasizing the act of assigning or making meanings implies that subjects do have some kind of agency, even if the meanings they make "depend on the ways of interpreting the world, on the discourses available to...[them]...at any particular moment..."⁴⁶

Agency is a complex term that has not been completely banished by post-structuralist notions of the decentered subject. Even Scott concedes that "subjects do have agency," although she points out, "they are not unified, autonomous individuals exercising free will; they do have choices, "although they are not unlimited."⁴⁷ It is relevant for this discussion because of the position it occupies between discourse and experience and because it is central in addressing questions of resistance. And again, we face a problematic delineation of terminological boundaries. One way to talk about this complex network of terms is to focus briefly on identity, which I define as a site of mediation between discourse and agency, a ground upon which subjects become agents as they encounter discourses and respond to, even resist discourses and in doing so, define their identities. This definition emerged from my own attempts to surmount Scott's oppositions between discourses and experiences (opposition in the sense of a one-way street: discourse always constructs experience). Thus, it is the moment of mediation -- and of agency -- that she appears to miss, an oversight that has the potential to "wound" as Renato Rosaldo pointed out at the Historic Turn conference in 1990.

Rosaldo was referring to Scott's discussion (in the conference version of her essay called "Historicizing Experience") of Samuel Delany and Cherrie Moraga as subjects-in-the-making, subjects (of course) constructed by discourses rather than subjects who mediated, challenged, resisted or transformed discourses and in the process, defined their own identities. So the "transformation" of Moraga's identity -- her recognition of herself as a "woman of color" -- "can be seen as the result of a collision of different discourses...."⁴⁸ It is analyzed "as a linguistic event."⁴⁹ Here I suggest that it is not an explicit denial of agency that seems "wounding." For here again Scott concedes that Moraga's transformation was bound up with "the discovery of new meanings and of new possibilities for agency," all, however within a discursive system that remains fixed.⁵⁰ "Wounding" is perhaps then the fixed and all-encompassing nature of the "discursive system," the impossibility of change, of contesting power (in its discursive form), of transforming or exploding discursive systems. Indeed, even if I am not personally "wounded." I think history is replete with examples where these kinds of transformations, explosions, revolutions occurred. Scott's somewhat derisive rejection of stories of emancipation in which "resistance and agency are presented as driven by uncontainable desire" not only refuses change, but denies the fact that desire (a very interesting kind of agency) does figure importantly in many stories of transformation or revolution.⁵¹

The question of historical transformation -- of discourses, of political, social and economic structures -- also arises in Scott's essay, "'L'ouvrière! Mot impie, sordide...'" Women Workers in the Discourse of French Political Economy, 1840-1860."⁵² This is one of several historically specific essays in Gender and the Politics of History and it provides a different kind of forum for discussion of Scott's particular version of post-structuralism than her essay on experience. The discourse she examines "define[d] the terms of a new science of economics....codif[ied] its laws and discipline[d] its practitioners."⁵³ Its participants "established the intellectual and institutional power of their science through control of knowledge and access to government...[and] were able to provide the conceptual framework within (and against) which those addressing economic questions had to work."⁵⁴ She argues convincingly that the "figure of the working woman" was at the center of this discourse "as an explicit topic in discussions of poverty, wages, occupations, and the family and as a way of signifying disorder."⁵⁵

Scott explores the contradictions within this discourse "by attending to the rhetorical as well as the literal functions of these writings, by examining the contrasts used to constitute meaning."⁵⁶ She delivers a fascinating analysis of the ways in which female sexuality was used metaphorically to talk about working-class misery: the ways in which women workers came to inhabit a "world of turbulent sexuality, subversive independence and dangerous insubordination" that placed them in close (discursive) proximity to prostitutes: "The interchangeable uses of **femmes isolées** suggested that all such working women were potential prostitutes, inhabiting a marginal and unregulated world in which good order -- social, economic, moral, political -- was subverted."⁵⁷

Although I began my discussion of this essay in order to critique it, I found this instance of "reading Scott reading"⁵⁸ particularly valuable for the insight it offers into the significance of "reading" in historical analysis (something we problematize only seldom). I would like to suggest that historians have much to learn from literary critical methods of reading texts. The ability to "attend to the rhetorical" aspects of historical texts, to their contrasts, exclusions and/or binary oppositions makes it possible to uncover things -- metaphors of female sexuality, for example -- that might otherwise be difficult to see or interpret. Learning how to read in new ways may, in fact, be an essential prerequisite for exploring the history of "experience" as a process of making, assigning or contesting meanings.

While I find Scott's reading of the discourse of mid-nineteenth century French political economy skillful, her discussion is limited to an analysis of meanings within this discursive system. It neglects the broader (historical) question of what this discourse meant or signified in the broader context of nineteenth-century French history. The reader comes to understand the internal workings of this discourse, but it remains oddly disembodied, fixed in time, static, detached from processes of historical change, and without historical origins or historical consequences. When and why did political economists begin to "see" women workers? What was the outcome of this discursive explosion during the mid-century, of the attempts of political economists to address public opinion and to translate their views into policy?⁵⁹ Scott draws the reader into a compelling analysis of this discourse only to resist the urge to contextualize it through analysis of its origins or impact. She insists that:

The prominence of the woman worker in the nineteenth century, then, came not so much from an increase in her numbers or a change in the location, quality or quantity of her work, as from contemporaries' preoccupation with gender as a sexual division of labor. This preoccupation was not caused by objective conditions of industrial development; rather it helped shape those conditions, giving relations of production their gendered form, women workers their secondary status, and home and work, reproduction and production their oppositional meanings.⁶⁰

This is a rather perplexing kind of reverse causality. At this point I will introduce my own work in order to offer an alternative analysis of the origins and outcomes of discourses of social reform in late nineteenth-century Germany .

2. Discourse, Ideology, and Identity: The Changing Industrial Landscape in Late Nineteenth-Century Germany

When I set out to do my research a few years ago I would not have thought to include "discourses about women's work" in my analysis of the "politics of work," which I defined to include union programs, strike movements, employers' policies, labor legislation and other forms of state intervention. In fact, I came upon the singular pieces of this discourse one by one as I researched the protracted transition from domestic to factory textile production and as I attempted to reconstruct the experiences of men and women in the "world behind the mill gate." Based on the evidence I found I wrote a chapter on the ideological construction of women's work in late nineteenth-century Germany, a chapter in which I analyzed the discourse of social reform during the 1890s as a formative moment in the making of that ideology.

In particular, I examined the ways in which discourses of social reform shifted during the 1890s from a focus on the generalized Arbeiterfrage (worker question) to that of the Arbeiterin (woman worker), especially the married woman worker. Along with growing anxieties about social democracy, social unrest and imperial expansion came fears about the working-class family, rent apart by the expansion of the female factory workforce -- children left to fend for themselves, men driven into the pubs by the dirty, inhospitable living quarters in the absence of wives and mothers. Reformers sought to preserve the working-class family as an anchor in a rapidly-changing world, a bulwark against social distress and disorder, some by "regulating" and "protecting" women workers, others by banning them altogether from factories. The "din of voices" raised in these debates included those of parliamentary representatives, state officials, union leaders, middle-class feminists, as well as some of Germany's leading social scientists: Brentano, Schmoller, Tönnies, and Max Weber, the latter obviously speaking as "scientific" experts, their voices contrasted with those of the Betroffene, those directly affected -- male weavers and union leaders who embraced a virulent rhetoric against Verweiblichung (feminization of industry) and Verdrängung (displacement of men from their jobs).

I attribute the origin of the heightened interest in and concern with the female factory worker to the steady and perceptible expansion of the female factory workforce during the last quarter of the century. As the economy boomed at the end of the century, employers faced a continuous labor shortage in nearly all industrial sectors, including the so-called "women's industries" of textiles, garments, and cigar-making. The married female workforce nearly doubled between 1882 and 1907 and the percentage of married women among adult female factory workers increased from 21 to 29 percent in the four-year period between 1895 and 1899.⁶¹ Accompanying the steady influx of female workers into factories was the spectre of Lohnrückerei (wages driven down by female competition) and the vision of "men transformed into maidens" -- by machines, by competition from women.⁶²

The narratives of danger about female factory labor ranged from scholarly treatises on Geschlechtscharakter (sexual/gender character or nature) to

shocking revelations about the effects of women's work -- women's bodies ravaged by machines and long hours of labor, infant mortality, filth and squalor in workers' living quarters -- that stimulated popular interest in the problem. The two kinds of narratives evoked dramatic visions of social dissolution that were replete with analogs between the destruction of the social body, the body of the family, and the physical bodies of women workers and the children they bore. Considering the diverse sites of this discourse -- academic, "scientific" research, parliamentary debates, state inquiries and state legislation, policies of employers' and unions, and even strikes against the hiring of women workers -- it is clear that the discursive construction of male and female labor was a powerful factor in constituting the world behind the mill gate. Indeed, I argue that the new ideology of women's work that emerged from this discourse around the turn of the century shaped the so-called "structures of production" -- the sexual division of labor and its hierarchies of wage and skill; the design and implementation of textile technology, the factory regime of discipline and punishment, as well as employers' moral regime of charity and tutelage.⁶³ Finally, I explore the implications of the discourse of social reform and the ideology of women's work for the world beyond the mill gate. Not only did it define a new industrial order, but it also recast the relationship between family and state, between sexual and social order and in doing so, shaped the formation and expansion of the German welfare state.

By now it is obvious that I consider it important to pose and attempt to answer questions about how and why a discourse emerges, not because I postulate that it somehow "reflects a reality," but because it is embedded in a specific historical context, such as (in this case) the rapid expansion of industry and of the female labor market in Germany. While Scott constructs an opposition between the discourse "being caused by industrial conditions," or "helping to shape them," in my view these are two central and intertwined aspects of the discourse about female factory labor in Germany. I certainly agree that discourses about social reform and female factory labor helped shape the industrial order in Germany, but I also see the growing numbers of female factory workers and the transformation of the industrial labor market in more than their "discursive dimensions." Contextualizing, historicizing discourse does not mean settling for an one-dimensional causality, as Scott implies. In fact, placing the analysis of discourses of social reform in the context of German industrial development makes it easier to see the power of discourse in shaping or defining a new sexual division of labor.

Furthermore, in Scott's analysis, women workers are present only as objects of discursive construction; their silence is juxtaposed with the loud and powerful voices of political economists holding forth on the perils of the industrial world as embodied in the femmes isolées. It seems important to me to attempt to break this silence -- however difficult this may be -- by analyzing the reception, the contestation, the multiple meanings of the texts, to render as subjects those whose labor was inscribed with ideologies of gender or to uncover the complex ways in which male and female workers might have interpreted, subverted or internalized discourses of labor or ideologies of work. This is one way to encourage what Sherry Ortner calls "pushing back." to

find a place in our texts for those whose lives we represent, to allow them to push back.⁶⁴

My analysis of the discursive construction of male and female labor forms only one chapter, not the whole story (although of course, it shapes the whole story). It is juxtaposed to a chapter on cultures of work and "work identities," a term I use to signify the meanings workers derived from their "work," the ways in which it "got under the skin of everyday life" (Patrick Joyce). While the meanings of "work" encompassed workers' machines, the products of their labor and their ethics of work, the social networks that divided or united the shopfloor, and even the physical space of the mill. I recognize that these meanings were also embedded in family, neighborhood, and community. I do not claim to "reconstruct" identities as they somehow might have existed, rather I attempt to "read" them using a variety of sources that can be compared and contrasted with one another (but I should add, still no whole or coherent picture emerges). Rather I think I can capture moments in which identities in and around work become visible, moments of self-representation, moments, for example, when workers express pride in their work in "public" ways. (I discovered celebrations of employment anniversaries in which workers put the products of their spindles or looms on display and decorated their machines in a festive manner.) Other moments include the "expressive cultural practices" through which workers adapted to and subverted ordained positions within the factory regime and the ideology of gender roles that underlay it through their everyday struggles over pride and honor, gossip and respectability, bodies and sexuality, "charity" and tutelage. I explore the needs, desires, and loyalties that propelled workers into organized protests as read in police and factory inspectors' reports; the ways they located themselves in factory and social hierarchies as read through factory fashion and dress codes. I evaluate the ways in which women traversed the borders between family demands and waged work through a close and critical evaluation of personnel records and a reconstruction of male and female employment patterns. In this analysis of work identities and cultures of work I explore the moments of accommodation and resistance and attempt to come to terms with the familiar but puzzling questions about where discourses begin and end, how they are transformed, how they empower and disempower, provoke and deflect resistance.

3. Discourse, Experience, and Resistance: Rewriting Histories of "Class"

In this section of my paper I will concentrate on a protracted moment in German history, the years 1917 through 1924, when a crisis of class -- the fracturing and (re)formation of the working-class -- converged with a crisis of nation. I argue that war, revolution, and demobilization represent profound transformations of "experiences" of working women as well as of discourses about them. I am particularly interested in the experience of demobilization, in both its social and discursive dimensions: the juxtaposition of women's newly-acquired right to vote with the demobilization decrees that displaced them from their jobs, of the rhetoric of civic equality for the sexes with the widescale Verunsicherung (loss of security) and the rapid erosion of rights.

The experiences of war and revolution, followed by this sudden and powerful transformation of the social climate surrounding women's work between 1918 and 1920, changed the political landscape of the textile unions as well. It formed the basis for the "feminization" of union politics, for a transformation of class by gender, and for the articulation of new political identities during the Weimar Republic.

My analysis of the feminization of politics in the social democratic textile union (DTV) represents an attempt to establish links between discourse and experience by reading the ways in which women responded to the rapid discursive shifts about gender and women's work after the First World War. It is a complex story of "discourses positioning subjects" and of subjects "talking back," of identities formed as subjects interacted with discourse. This time, however, female subjects interacted not only with "hegemonic" discourses of state or social policy, but also with discourses of class which, for a time, were conjoined when the Social Democrats took state power in 1918. Thus, the story of the feminization of politics is also one about resistance to and transformation of the discourse, the ideology of class.⁶⁵

Before the First World War, especially between 1908 and 1914, female activists in the DTV had implemented a political rhetoric of their own centered around the term Eigenart (particularity, also implying special needs) which opposed the universalist claims of "class" by emphasizing women's particular needs. The politics of Eigenart did not represent a rejection of the politics of "class" as much as a contest of the boundaries established by male leaders: women insisted, for example, not upon separate organizations, rather upon their own space within the union, a space in which the renunciation of gender was not a prerequisite of class. The vocabulary of Eigenart refused the dichotomies of class politics between women's work for wages and their work as mothers and wives, claiming special consideration of women workers as mothers and wives and asserting that women's overlapping identities, rather than signifying their inherent "backwardness," represented a political potential that was overlooked or scorned by men.⁶⁶

Female union activists in the DTV sought recognition of Eigenart in their everyday struggles in the workplace -- for higher wages and a shorter work day, for greater protection of pregnant workers -- and through their campaigns within the union to hold separate women's meetings, to establish a women's supplement to the union paper or to increase the numbers of women in the higher echelons of union administration. Although women made modest gains in these areas before the war, they remained a minority in the union and negative images of women workers continued to pervade union rhetoric. Despite the predominance of women in the textile mills and the steady expansion of female membership in the DTV before the war, female activists' efforts to redefine the politics of "class", embedded in male notions of work ethos, skill and wage, remained largely unsuccessful. Yet they seeded the ground for a transformation of union politics after the war. On the eve of the First World War, one female organizer predicted that the unions would soon be thoroughly transformed by the growing presence of women: "The future in our organization belongs to women....It is even possible that men will one day have to fight themselves for

equality in our organization."⁶⁷

The experience of war (again, in its social and discursive dimensions) is crucial to understanding the feminization of union politics that occurred during the 1920s. The war permeated the world behind the mill gate first as production came to a standstill in many mills and again as the manufacturing process was restructured to meet military demands.⁶⁸ Still many mills were forced to shut down or to work erratically and thousands of textile workers -- male and female -- were forced to seek new jobs in the armaments industry.⁶⁹ The boundaries between Frauen- and Männerindustrien (female and male industries) dissolved during the war as women ventured into previously male sectors of production. Significant numbers of women -- both those who remained in the textile mills and those who sought work in the armaments plants -- were trained to use and to repair complex machinery, to perform "skilled" or supervisory jobs.⁷⁰ As the German economy became increasingly dependent upon women and as the state, employers, factory inspectors, and local officials joined efforts to "enlighten women about how urgently their work is needed," the place of women in national and military discourses about labor was transformed.⁷¹ Women's work for the fatherland, no longer "secondary," "destructive" [of family, of men], or "exorbitant" [in order to enjoy "luxury"] was imbued, if only for a few years, with the honor and esteem that had otherwise been reserved for skilled male breadwinners.

A parallel process took place within the textile unions as thousands of male members left for the front and women took their places at local unions posts. Within a few years, the DTV became a predominantly female union: by 1916 women comprised some sixty percent of members, increasing to 74 percent by 1918, and the number of women who held union posts grew from some 1,800 in 1913 to 3,000 in 1917.⁷² Furthermore, separate union meetings for women -- a controversial demand of female activists before the war -- became the norm during the war.⁷³ Indeed, the departure of so many men from their families, their jobs and their union posts, may have encouraged the development of a kind of female sub-culture, a wartime anomaly that may have allowed the politics of Eigenart to flourish, while at the same time women (ironically) were proving that they could take on "men's jobs" and "men's responsibilities." Again in this case it is important to emphasize the shifting discursive context: political rhetoric within the union changed markedly as punitive reprimands of female backwardness gave way to respectful acknowledgement of the fact that women had indeed become "the core of the organization."⁷⁴ Moreover, outside of the unions, increasing numbers of female workers defied the Burgfriede (agreement between the unions and government for a "civil peace" during wartime); women comprised 62 percent of industrial strike participants in 1916 and 75 percent in 1917.⁷⁵

Even though the numbers of female union members had rapidly expanded, female activists faced new challenges when the war came to a close. In 1918, unemployment among textile workers exceeded the worst months of the war, as military production ceased and all available raw materials remained under control of the War Ministry.⁷⁶ At the same time, men were returning from the front, hoping to reclaim their former jobs. The Demobilmachungsverordnungen

(demobilization decrees) were enacted by the government in order to restore employment immediately to returning soldiers. They targeted not only married women but all so-called "Doppelverdiener" (double-earners), whose husbands, fathers or brothers were employed and could (presumably) provide for them. The decrees forced thousands of women to relinquish their jobs in favor of men.⁷⁷ By 1920 some 8,100 married women had been dismissed from their jobs in the textile industry in order to make room for men.⁷⁸ The union press and conference protocols offer no indication that the DTV challenged the decrees or sought to protect the interests of its female constituents during the hardships of demobilization.

Although the numbers of "demobilized" women may have been relatively small, the decrees signalled an abrupt discursive transformation as the rhetoric of "Doppelverdienertum" replaced the salutations of women's sacrifices for the fatherland. While the new rhetoric revived old fears of displacement of male breadwinners by cheaper female labor and the degeneration of the family, the discourse of demobilization took on a new, shrill tone that revealed the gravity of the post-war crisis. For this crisis was more urgent and more severe than the social dislocation of the 1890s: it reached from the individual male breadwinner and his family to the declining national birthrate to the task of national regeneration and recovery after the war. Discussions about the economic, social, and political crisis were replete with visions of a sexual order gone awry, even though the full and long-term dimensions of these crises were not yet known. The demobilization decrees can be viewed as the first step towards a post-war realignment of sexual and social order.⁷⁹

In the meantime a kind of political demobilization took place within the union as men returned after the war to dominate its executive and to reclaim their former posts on the local level. While the numbers of new female members skyrocketed⁸⁰, the union found itself embroiled in internal conflicts as union leadership and rank-and-file split between the radical or Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) and Majority Social Democratic Party.⁸¹ The dissension within the union, as well as the spread of politically-charged labor unrest and general strikes during 1920, meant that union leaders had yet to assess the significance of the new female majority. In an union enmeshed in conflict and imbued with a new rhetoric of civic gender equality, the "woman question" remained submerged: indeed, at its congress in 1919 the DTV executive even voted to dismantle the Women's Bureau as its members concluded "that a special type of training for women was unnecessary."⁸² Male leaders had long ago mastered the rhetoric of equality, which designated female Eigenart as superfluous, even reactionary. Now they pointed to women's experiences of war, revolution, and democracy as proof of their "equal" abilities and status.

After the war female activists resumed their efforts to recast the union's women's program in terms of female Eigenart, to establish a female sphere within, not separate from, the union. This represents a renewal of the politics of Eigenart, rather than a new political program, but it was backed this time by the presence of many more active women. Female activists rebelled openly at the union's 1921 congress, demanding the restoration of the Women's Bureau and the appointment of a salaried female member of the

executive. Embracing the new rhetoric of rights, they insisted that "in view of the strength of our female membership, we have a right to have a representative here at this congress".⁸³ The fulfillment of women's postwar demands was delayed by the political upheavals of 1920 and 1921 and then by the crisis of 1923-24, when issues of Frauenpolitik were again submerged while the union contended with the effects of economic collapse and drastic unemployment.⁸⁴ The new crisis, like the old, took on highly gendered forms as the rhetoric of Doppelverdiener was revived and women were subjected to Bedürftigkeitsprüfungen (tests of need) in order to receive unemployment benefits. Indeed, the shift towards a feminization of politics began in the wake of this crisis, during which the DTV lost nearly 60 percent of its female members.⁸⁵

In the aftermath of the crisis and under pressure from female activists, the DTV leadership adopted a new strategy, one that embraced female Eigenart by placing women's "private" or "personal" reproductive burdens at the center of its women's program. Between 1925 and 1928 the female body -- the embodiment of female Eigenart -- emerged in the arena of class politics as female activists raised demands pertaining to pregnancy, birth control, abortion, and housework. The appearance of a politicized female body in union politics stands in stark contrast to the pre-war politics of class that had vehemently rejected a consideration of female Eigenart. Indeed, it represents something fundamentally new in the history of the German labor movement, something that is, perhaps, conceivable only in a union dominated by women, yet the leadership of the DTV remained thoroughly male until 1927.

Three examples illustrate (briefly) how the female body figured in the feminization of union politics.

1. During the mid-1920s the DTV undertook a new battle with mill owners over the protection of pregnant women at work.⁸⁶ It launched an inquiry into the numbers of complications experienced by some 1,000 pregnant textile workers and presented its shocking findings in a petition to the Reichstag in 1925. The DTV spoke here not primarily on behalf of "class", but in the name of its 330,000 female members, 40 percent of whom were married, and in particular on behalf of the some 90,000 pregnant women who worked full-time in the textile mills in 1925.⁸⁷ Its petition was endorsed by Dr. Max Hirsch who confirmed the DTV's findings that two-thirds of pregnant textile workers experienced complications in childbirth, including very high rates of miscarriage and stillbirth.

With this petition, (published in 1925 with the DTV survey in brochure-form entitled "Wage Labor, Pregnancy, Women's Suffering"), the DTV shifted the terms of the anxiety-ridden discourse about sexual emancipation and the declining birth rate, brought the conditions of child-bearing and motherhood into sharper focus, and inserted the pregnant female body into political debates in the Reichstag.⁸⁸ Hirsch's brochure (appended to the DTV's petition) visualized these conditions through numerous photographs of pregnant women at work. In each case the task is different -- weaving, spinning, winding, finishing -- but the common theme is the swollen belly pressed up

against moving machinery. Despite adamant claims by the textile employers' association that the DTV's figures were exaggerated, and that many childbirth complications could be attributed to "venereal disease", the German government expanded the protection of pregnant women workers and their infants in 1927 by extending mandatory maternity leave from eight to twelve weeks and by instituting Stillpausen (nursing breaks up to two and a half hours daily).

2. In October 1926, the DTV broke with its tradition of prohibiting separate meetings for women and convened a congress for its women members (called the First Congress of Female Textile Workers). The congress, which met in Gera, drew some 280 female and 63 male delegates, most of whom were long-time union activists, in addition to factory inspectors, doctors' and midwives' organizations, representatives from the Labor Ministry and the Prussian Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and officials of the Social Democratic and Communist Parties.⁸⁹ Female Eigenart -- the special needs of pregnant women, of new mothers, of unwed mothers, and women in need of birth control or abortion -- was the starting point of the congress.⁹⁰ While the delegates heard testimony from mothers who were forced to stand until the last moment before birth at their machines, medical doctors discussed methods, availability, and legality of birth control and presented the congress with the statistics about the epidemic of illegal and dangerous abortion among working-class women.⁹¹ On the last day of the some 8,000 textile workers -- mostly women -- demonstrated through the streets of Gera (a textile center), raising banners that linked the politics of the body to the politics of the workplace. They called for a restoration of the eight-hour day; for expanded maternity leave; access to birth control; repeal of Paragraph 218, the law that banned abortion; and finally for the liberation of women from housework.⁹² Whereas motherhood had figured prominently in the rhetoric of Eigenart before the war (one motto had been to appeal to the woman worker as mother), the feminized politics of the 1920s centered on freedom from the "Gebärzwang" (compulsory child-bearing).

The protocol of the Gera congress also points to the ways that the new emphasis on the body in union politics was embedded in a new commitment to equality based on the recognition of difference or Eigenart (to echo current debates). It reveals that the politics of the body was the most radical aspect of a thoroughly redefined women's program.⁹³ At the same time that the union forged a new link between production and reproduction, it also sought to articulate a new image of woman worker, one that dispelled notions of women as temporary or secondary workers. Speakers at the Gera congress criticized "the false ideal" of the full-time housewife and mother that schools, employers, and some labor leaders still held up to female workers. They pointed out that it was one that most women "will never have the opportunity to realize," not only because most women had to work, but also because female textile workers were "rooted in their occupations" and found a sense of accomplishment in their jobs.⁹⁴ Spokeswoman Else Niviera introduced a resolution condemning all attempts to restrict the economic or political independence of women, especially measures to remove married women or so-called "double earners" from their jobs. She appealed to the delegates to abolish this vocabulary of marginalization, which itself "reinforces the contempt among the public for

women's employment outside the home, gives employers a new justification for paying women lower wages, and furthermore, divides the workers' movement...."⁹⁵ The fact that the delegates passed the resolution indicates that they had come to recognize the power of rhetoric and imagery in the economic and political marginalization of women. Thus, the politics of the body must also be viewed as part of a larger project of discursive (rhetoric, image) transformation.

3. The frequent discussion of housework -- the sexual division of the labor in the "private" sphere of home and family -- was another important aspect of the feminization of politics in the DTV during the 1920s. At the Gera congress female delegates had raised demands for day-care, communal laundries, kitchens, and cafeterias in order to liberate women from housework and had called upon the union's 1927 general congress to recognize the benefits of a socialization of housework for women, men and the union itself.⁹⁶ The DTV's essay contest for female textile workers, launched in 1928, was a fact-finding mission for the union. Like the DTV's petition to the Reichstag regarding childbirth complications, the publication of 150 essays in a brochure entitled Mein Arbeitstag - mein Wochenende inserted the everyday lives of working women into the union's campaign for expanded health and safety protection, shortened work hours, higher wages, and consumer coops.⁹⁷

The published essays, despite the abbreviated and edited form in which they appeared, attest to the fluid boundaries between waged work and housework. The main theme of the essays is time and many recount in minute detail the amount of time required for preparing meals, cleaning, darning, walking to and from work, the scarcity of time for children, husband, parents, leisure, for self-education or for cultivation of new domestic or political skills.⁹⁸ They attest to sexual difference as experienced in everyday life. Interestingly, these 150 essays efface (in a perplexing way) the sexual or desiring body, the pregnant or nursing body, the body ravaged by frequent abortions. They lack the passion, the urgency of the brochure on "Wage Labor, Pregnancy, Women's Suffering." Yet they insert a female body into political debate (in particular the campaign for the eight-hour day) that is hassled, hurried, exhausted and depleted by the daily double burden.⁹⁹

Why did the politicized female body emerge at this juncture and how did it transform class politics? First, it is important to consider the new "politics of the body" in the textile union as one part of the wider medical, eugenic, and political discourses about female emancipation, sexual reform, birth control, and abortion that were ongoing during the Weimar Republic.¹⁰⁰ But it is also necessary to point to the specific ways in which the female body figures in union political discourses during the 1920s. After all, the starting point of union politics is usually the body circumscribed by factory work, by its encounters with machines. However, the female body(ies) that appears in the DTV's petitions to the Reichstag, the brochure on "women's suffering," the demonstration for accessible birth control and abortion, and in essays like "The Clock Ticks On." (Mein Arbeitstag - mein Wochenende) is unique precisely in that it performs different kinds of work all at once: weaving or spinning, birthing and nursing, cooking, cleaning, and caring for children. Furthermore, in joining rather than severing the different spheres of work,

this female body of the 1920s became emblematic of Eigenart; in a sense it fulfilled the positive recognition of difference that female activists had long demanded. It attests not only to the growing presence of women in the union but also to their increasing power to contest the dominant meanings of class, to appropriate the vocabulary of class and to imprint in with their own needs, and ultimately, to transform one arena of class politics. Finally, inserting the female body into union politics made explicit the political meanings of sexual difference and opened the way for the formation of a distinctly female political identity within the organized labor movement.

4. Conclusion: The Body and the Boundaries between Discourse and Experience

The centrality of the female body to a feminization of politics raises interesting questions about the experiences of the body in the making of subjectivity / identity, about the body as a site of resistance. For example, how does the body's experience in war, revolution, demobilization (hunger, stealing, striking, demonstrating, birthing or aborting alone) figure in the transformations of consciousness (or subjectivity) I have outlined in my analysis of the feminization of politics? How do we relate the discursively constructed body to the bodily abjection not only of wartime, but also of factory work, ceaseless childbearing, etc.?

Elisabeth Domansky's analysis of "World War I as Gender Conflict" points out that men's bodies were not the only ones wounded by war. She reveals that the body figured centrally in women's memories of war:

They did not recall a generalized immiseration, but the ceasing of menstruation, their inability to breast-feed their children, and the erosion of their good looks. They interpreted the loss of weight not simply as a loss of strength and health, but as a loss of attractiveness. War defeminized them and turned them into prematurely old women. War wounded them as it wounded the men.¹⁰¹

Furthermore, during the war the state's interest in the female body as a site of discursive intervention undoubtedly grew, mainly because the birth rate began to figure more importantly in state planning as the death toll at the front climbed. While this was not new, perhaps the erosion of civil society, the increased surveillance by the militarized state and the sense that the "front was everywhere," made women feel this intervention and regulation more acutely than before the war.¹⁰² It is plausible that the war constituted a juncture at which women workers became acutely aware of their bodies as political objects/ sites of intervention and perhaps also as political weapons.

The war may have constituted a turning point in the "politicization" of the body, but it seems to me that it was the experiences of the body in all the realms of "work" -- the day-to-day "wounding" -- that propelled women into the

streets of Gera in 1926: the endless cycle of cooking, washing, cleaning, and mending, work without recognition or pay that decided a family's day to day survival; the mechanization and depletion of the body by machines in the mills and the vulnerability of the body to illness, injury, or rape; the miscarriages, stillbirths, pregnancies plagued by pain and complications, the danger and death associated with illegal abortion and the frequent deaths of infants and children. In sum, it is the insurmountable limits of the body that are inscribed in their protests. It is the body stripped of "the natural frontier of the self" that becomes a site of resistance.¹⁰³

In her remarkable book, Subjectivities. A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920, Regenia Gagnier analyzes the ways in which the body figures in the self-representation (autobiographies) of working-class women. In emphasizing the importance of the body in shaping working-class women's subjectivity, she raises important questions about post-structuralist notions of subjectivity. "Reproductive suffering," she argues, "was an essential component of the subjectivity in question: that is what it was like to be a working-class woman."¹⁰⁴ Women's experiences of "extreme physical abjection or loss of boundaries" is central to their transformation into subjects, to their resistance. Gagnier cites "their own terminology" to signify the loss of boundaries: "...they suffered continually from misplacements, womb displacement, falling of the womb, gathered breasts, breasts in slings, childbed fever, husbands' abuse of the organs of reproduction, cold in the ovaries, varicose veins, marble leg ...untimely flooding...and the psychologically maddening grinding of machinery in the factory," the sense that their bodies "'are going round with the machinery,'" and finally the despair of the "'mother [who] wonders what she has to live for; if there is another baby coming she hopes it will be dead when it is born.'"¹⁰⁵

The final stage in the story of subjectivity revealed in these letters" offers an interesting parallel to my analysis of the feminization of politics in the DTV. It is one of transformation -- "from subjective isolation within their bodies to subjects with claims upon the State," subjects who resisted their alienation from their "laboring bodies" and who "now used their bodies to change culture," that is, to win maternity benefits under the National Insurance Law and the establishment of Municipal Maternity Centres.¹⁰⁶

What are the implications of this vision of body without boundaries for the preceding discussion of discourse, experience, and resistance? In one respect it is illustrative of the ways in which experience, in this case experience embedded in the body, is structured "by more than linguistic conventions" (or discourses.)¹⁰⁷ It also makes it very difficult to imagine a body that has no meaning "outside of its discursive constitution." Indeed, it points to ways in which the body, permeated by discourses and transfigured by work and pain, becomes a site of resistance. This discussion also raises more complex questions about the body on the frontier of post-modernism. The specificity of the female bodily experience in this analysis -- the foregrounding of "reproductive suffering" -- raises the complex issue of biology, the question of whether it is possible to speak of the body without resorting to some kind of biological essentialism. Interestingly, this vision

of the body without boundaries, although it is vaguely post-modern, appears to counter post-structuralist theories of the body, in which the body "threatens to disappear entirely."¹⁰⁸ or others that invite us to "'take pleasure'" in the "'confusion of boundaries.'" in the fragmentation and fraying of the edges of the self that have already taken place."¹⁰⁹ In presenting an alternative reading of the body, this analysis points to the importance of the body -- as site of experience, subjectivity, and resistance -- in resolving the dilemmas of post-modernism, in exploring the limits of its "choreography of multiplicity."¹¹⁰

End Notes

1. See Linda Nicholson and Nancy Fraser, "Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism," in: Linda Nicholson (ed.), Feminism/Postmodernism (New York/London 1990), pp. 19-38.

2. Jane Caplan offers one of the most useful definitions of post-structuralism in her essay, "Postmodernism, Post-structuralism, Deconstruction," Central European History 22/nos.3/4 (September/December 1989), pp. 260-278. "Post-structuralism is a theory, or a bundle of theories and intellectual practices, that derives from a creative engagement with its 'predecessor,' structuralism...The poststructuralism advanced by the later Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, and others rejects the stability, integrity, and closure of the structuralist system, the binarism that allegedly underpins it, and the proposition that the truth of the system is intelligible to an observer or reader who occupies the appropriate vantage point."

See also Chris Weedon's chapter on "Principles of Poststructuralism," in her book, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (Oxford/Cambridge, MA 1987), pp. 12-42 and Bill Sewell's definition in his essay, "Gender, History and Deconstruction: Joan Wallach Scott's Gender and the Politics of History (CSST Working Paper #34) (August 1989), p. 10.

3. See Isabel Hull, "Feminist and Gender History Through the Literary Looking Glass: German Historiography in Postmodern Times," Central European History 22/nos.3/4 (September/December 1989), p. 280.

4. Ibid., pp. 288-289.

5. Geoff Eley, "Is All the World A Text? From Social History to the History of Society Two Decades Later." (Paper presented to CSST Conference on the Historic Turn in the Social Sciences, October, 1990), p. 3.

6. See Weedon, Feminist Practice, pp. xvii, 20: "In this context, a theory is useful if it is able to address the questions of how social power is exercised and how social relations of gender, class and race might be transformed." Poovey also calls upon feminism to "rewrite deconstruction so as to incorporate its strategies into a political project...." See her essay, "Feminism and Deconstruction," Feminist Studies, 14/1 (Spring 1988), p. 51.

7. Weedon, Feminist Practice, p. 33.

8. Ibid., p. 21.

9. Peggy Kamuf, "Replacing Feminist Criticism," in: Marilyn Hirsch and Evelyn Fox-Keller (eds.), Conflicts in Feminism (New York/London 1990), p. 107.

10. Deborah Esch, "Deconstruction," in: Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (eds.), Redrawing the Boundaries of Literary Study in English (New York: MLA Publications, forthcoming 1992), pp. 5, 8.

11. Mary Poovey, "Feminism and Deconstruction," Feminist Studies, 14/1 (Spring 1988), p. 58.
12. Susan Bordo, "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism," in Nicholson, Feminism/Postmodernism, p. 135.
13. Ibid., pp. 135-136.
14. Ibid.
15. Nancy Hartsock, "Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?," in: Nicholson, Feminism/Postmodernism, p. 163.
16. Poovey, "Feminism and Deconstruction," pp. 57-58, 60-63.
17. Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism," pp. 34-35.
18. Ibid.
19. Regenia Gagnier, Subjectivities. A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920 (New York, 1991), pp. 9-10.
20. Weedon, Feminist Practice, p. 95.
21. Ibid., p. 25. See also Deborah Esch, "Deconstruction," p. 5. Esch cites Derrida's use of the term "non-discursive" forces.
22. Hartsock, "Foucault on Power," p. 167.
23. Ibid., p. 170.
24. Ibid.
25. Weedon, Feminist Practice, pp. 97, 106, 110.
26. Weedon, Feminist Practice, p. 106.
27. See Claudia Koonz's energetic critique of Gender and the Politics of History, in: Women's Review of Books 6/4 (January 1989), pp. 19-20; Jane Caplan's more measured and favorable review, "Gender is Everywhere," The Nation, (Jan 9/16, 1989), pp. 62-65; Bryan Palmer's chapter on gender, especially the section, "The Scott Files," in: Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History (Philadelphia 1990), pp. 172-183; the somewhat acrimonious debate between Scott and Linda Gordon in Signs (Summer 1990); and Catherine Hall's review of Gender and the Politics of History, "Politics, Post-structuralism and Feminist History," in: Gender and History 3/2 (Summer 1991), pp. 204-210.
28. Eley, "Is All the World A Text?," p. 15.

29. Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," Critical Inquiry 17/3 (Summer 1991), pp. 776-777. An earlier version of this paper, "Historicizing Experience," was presented to the CSST Conference on the Historic Turn in the Social Sciences, October 1990.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., p. 775.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., p. 776.
34. Ibid., p. 775.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., p. 777.
37. Ibid., p. 778.
38. Ibid., p. 777.
39. Ibid., p. 797.
40. Ibid., pp. 792-793.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid., p. 779.
43. William H. Sewell, Jr. "Gender, History, and Deconstruction: Joan Wallach Scott's Gender and the Politics of History," CSST Working Paper # 34 (August 1989), p. 17.
44. Sherry Ortner, "Who Shapes the Text: Sherpas and Sahibs on Mt. Everest," presented to the CSST Conference on the Historic Turn in the Social Sciences, October 1990, p. 3.
45. Sewell, "Gender, History, and Deconstruction," p. 19.
46. Weedon, Feminist Practice, p. 79.
47. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," pp. 792-793.
48. Scott, "Historicizing Experience," p. 18. It should be noted that this paragraph on Moraga is omitted from the version of this paper that appeared in Critical Inquiry.
49. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," pp. 792-793.

50. Ibid. Although I should also point out that Scott qualifies her use of "agency" in the following manner. "I don't mean agency as the action of an autonomous unified subject exercising free will, but rather an agency created through situations and statuses conferred on individuals, 'subject to definite conditions of existence, conditions of endowment of agents and conditions of exercise.'" See Scott, "Historicizing Experience," p. 17 and "The Evidence of Experience," p. 793. Here she cites Parveen Adams and Jeff Minson, "The 'Subject' of Feminism," m/f, no. 2, (1978), p. 52.
51. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," p. 778.
52. Joan Scott, "'L'ouvrière! Mot impie, sordide...'" Women workers in the discourse of French political economy, 1840-1860" in: Gender and the Politics of History (New York, 1988), pp. 139-163.
53. Ibid., p. 141.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., p. 154.
57. Ibid., pp. 143, 147.
58. This is a play on the much-discussed Reading DeMan Reading, edited by Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis 1989).
59. Ibid., p. 141.
60. Joan Scott, "The Woman Worker in the Nineteenth Century," in: La Storia della Donne (1990?), p. 43.
61. "Married women" here denotes married and formerly married women (widows and women who were divorced or separated from husbands.) The married female workforce grew by 90 percent, the single female workforce by 78 percent between 1882 and 1907. The numbers of unmarried female factory workers increased at a slightly slower pace. Figures here based on: Stefan Bajohr, Die Hälfte der Fabrik, Geschichte der Frauenarbeit in Deutschland, (Marburg 1979), p. 25; Hanns Dorn, "Die Frauenerwerbsarbeit und ihre Aufgaben für die Gesetzgebung," Archiv für Rechts- und Wirtschaftsphilosophie 5 (1911/12), pp. 86-87; Rose Otto, über Fabrik-arbeit, p. 10; Helene Simon, Der Anteil der Frau an der deutschen Industrie, (Jena 1910), p. 7; Ludwig Pohle, "Die Erhebungen der Gewerbeaufsichtsbeamten über die Fabrikarbeit verheirateter Frauen," Jahrbuch für Gesetzgebung, Verwaltung, und Volkswirtschaft 25 (1901), pp. 158-161.
62. Robert Wilbrandt, Die Weber, p. 31. The implication of the word "maiden" here is also that of "hand-maiden" of a machine.

63. Joan Scott observes that a new, ideological sexual division of labor based on the naturalization of sexual difference was postulated in France at the very point in time when machinery held the promise "to dissolve all differences among workers." Scott, "L'ouvrière!," op. cit., p. 148.

64. Ortner, "Who Shapes the Text," p. 3.

65. While it is certainly true that "class" was only one of several possible political identities, in Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany -- this is perhaps a kind of German "peculiarity" -- "class" had a singular kind of discursive "power." Class was the primary political identity postulated among German workers, not least because of the predominance of the Social Democratic Party and its unions among German workers. "Class" as political rhetoric permeated the discourses of Social Democracy, Catholicism, and liberal Protestant social reform efforts and echoed from the outposts of rural union locals to provincial and national parliaments. Even those who opposed the self-conscious "working class" embraced its vocabulary in articulating that opposition.

66. DTV, Protokoll 1908, p. 214; Protokoll 1910, p. 227; DTV, "An unsere Kolleginnen," Der Textilarbeiter 22/30 (July 29, 1910).

67. DTV, Protokoll 1914, speech by Anna Simon.

68. Elisabeth Domansky argues convincingly that civilian society ceased to exist during the war when everyone became part of the "war machine" in "World War I as Gender Conflict in Germany," (forthcoming).

69. Ute Daniel dispenses with the myth that the majority of women who went to work in factories during the war were housewives, employed for the first time. Her work demonstrates that most of the women employed in armaments production during the war had worked before the war in other industrial sectors, above all textiles. See Ute Daniel, Arbeiterfrauen in der Kriegsgesellschaft: Beruf, Familie und Politik im Ersten Weltkrieg (Göttingen 1989). See also: DTV, Jahrbuch 1914-1915 (Berlin 1916), pp. 31-32; DTV, Jahrbuch 1916, (Berlin 1917), pp. 12, 10-111; DTV, Jahrbuch 1917, (Berlin 1918), pp. 76-93. Local reports from the Rhineland indicate that by 1916 textile production in some small textile towns had come to a virtual standstill as most textile mills closed and textile workers found work in armaments plants nearby.

70. HStAD, Regierung Düsseldorf 33581, "Bericht der Gewerbeinspektor für Crefeld Stadt und Land und Kreis Kempen von 30.3.1917." According to this report, many women received training, some of whom were able to repair the machines when they broke down and in the words of the inspector: "Hierdurch können mit der Zeit bisher unentbehrliche männliche Kräfte ersetzt werden." See also Ute Daniel, Arbeiterfrauen in der Kriegsgesellschaft: Beruf, Familie und Politik im ersten Weltkrieg (Göttingen 1989).

71. HStAD, Regierung Düsseldorf 33485, Correspondence marked 174/8 1917. This correspondence is damaged and it is impossible to discern its origin. Based on the other documents in this file, it seems likely that it was compiled by a local Kriegsamtstelle in the Rhineland for the Regierungspräsident in Düsseldorf.

72. DTV, Jahrbuch 1914-1915, pp. 282, 307; Jahrbuch 1917, pp. 72-74. These figures represent an increase from 3.2 percent in 1913 to 7.5 percent of female members who were active in the union administration in 1917. By 1915, 78 (or 25 percent) of 316 locals were headed by women; by 1917 nine women had joined the Gauvorstände (district executive committees) and 917 women had taken over their husbands' union jobs.

73. DTV, "Frauenversammlungen während des Krieges," Der Textilarbeiter 27/5 (January 29, 1915), p. 19; "Kriegszusammenkünfte der Arbeiterinnen," Der Textilarbeiter 27/38 (September 17, 1915), p. 152; DTV, Jahrbuch 1914-1915, p. 283. The latter reports mentions that the women's meetings had a high attendance.

74. DTV, Protokoll, 1917, pp. 127-129.

75. DTV, Jahrbuch 1916, pp. 95-97; Jahrbuch 1917, pp. 63-71. Only 26 percent of those involved (male and female) in 1916 and only 36 percent in 1917 were union members.

76. DTV, Jahrbuch 1918, (Berlin 1919), pp. 72-73.

77. In my view we still know very little about demobilization, particularly with respect to its effect on women workers. See: Richard Bessel, "'Eine nicht allzu große Beunruhigung des Arbeitsmarktes,' Frauenarbeit und Demobilisierung in Deutschland nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg," Geschichte und Gesellschaft 9 (1983), pp. 211-229 and on demobilization in Berlin: Susanne Rouette, "Die sozialpolitische Regulierung der Frauenarbeit. Arbeitsmarkt- und Fürsorgepolitik in den Anfangsjahren der Weimarer Republik. Das Beispiel Berlin," Phil. Diss., Technische Universität Berlin 1991.

78. DTV, Jahrbuch 1920, (Berlin 1921), pp. 91-92. This figure represents 2.7% of the total female workforce included in a survey of DTV locals. It encompassed 491,202 workers in 7,864 mills.

79. It should be noted that married women represented 25 percent of textile workers who were laid-off in the course of demobilization.

80. Female membership in the DTV increased by over 450 percent, as some 260,000 women joined the union between December 1918 and the end of 1920. Male membership increased by an even faster rate of 740 percent between 1918 and 1920 as men returned to their jobs and to the union after the war.

81. DTV, Protokoll 1917, pp. 53, 77; Jahrbuch 1919, p. 3; Protokoll des 14. Verbandstages des Deutschen Textilarbeiterverbandes, abgehalten von 27. June - 2. Juli 1921 in Breslau, pp. 100-101, 108, 130. USPD followers, who apparently constituted the majority in the union executive between 1917 and 1920, called for socialization of the textile industry and for utilization of the mass strike as a weapon of class struggle against resurgent capitalist control.
82. DTV, Protokoll 1921, p. 146. The speaker to the 1921 congress claimed that union leaders had concluded in 1919, "daß eine besondere Aufklärung der Arbeiterinnen nicht nötig war."
83. DTV, Protokoll 1921, pp. 90-91.
84. DTV, Protokoll des 15. Verbandstags des Deutschen Textilarbeiterverband, abgehalten von 16.-19. April, 1924 in Cassel, p. 60. Leader Hermann Jäckel noted in his address to the congress that there would be fewer reports on women's issues at this congress because of the "critical situation in which the union finds itself in the present time."
85. According to my calculation (based on Table 1) the male membership declined by 46 percent between 1923 and 1925, while female membership declined by 57 percent during the same period. Although the percentage of women declined steadily after 1923, women continued to constitute the majority of DTV members.
86. Hauptstaatsarchiv Detmold, Regierung Minden M1IG 172, pp. 256-257: "Offener Brief des Hauptvorstandes des DTV an den Arbeitgeberverband der Deutschen Textilindustrie" (no date); pp. 260-268: "Schreiben des Arbeitgeberverbandes der Deutschen Textilindustrie betr. Antrag des DTV vom 1. April 1925 auf Erweiterung der gesetzlichen Bestimmungen zum Schutze schwangerer Arbeiterinnen;" pp. 273-300: "Eingabe des Arbeitgeberverbandes der Deutschen Textilindustrie vom 28.10.1926 an die Reichsregierung mit zwei ärztlichen Gutachten beigefügt." See also the brochure circulated by the DTV by Dr. Max Hirsch, Die Gefahren der Frauenerwerbsarbeit für Schwangerschaft, Geburt, Wochenbett und Kindesaufzucht mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Textilindustrie, (Berlin 1925). See also DTV, Jahrbuch 1923-1924, p. 43.
87. See DTV, Umfang der Frauenarbeit in der deutschen Textilindustrie: Erwerbsarbeit, Schwangerschaft, Frauenleid. Berlin, 1925; Max Hirsch, Die Gefahren der Frauenerwerbsarbeit für Schwangerschaft, Geburt, Wochenbett und Kindesaufzucht mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Textilindustrie. Berlin, 1925; see also Cornelia Osborne, The Politics of the Body in Weimar Germany: Reproductive Rights and Duties (Draft manuscript, forthcoming 1992 Univ. of Michigan Press), pp. 111-113.
88. See Osborne on the broader discourses on birth rate, sexual emancipation, and national decline. HStADetmold, Regierung Minden M1IG 172, pp. 256-257: "Offener Brief des Hauptvorstandes des DTV an den Arbeitgeberverband der Deutschen Textilindustrie" (no date); pp. 260-268: "Schreiben des Arbeitgeberverbandes der Deutschen Textilindustrie betr. Antrag des DTV vom 1.

April 1925 auf Erweiterung der gesetzlichen Bestimmungen zum Schutze schwangerer Arbeiterinnen;" pp. 273-300: "Eingabe des Arbeitgeberverbandes der Deutschen Textilindustrie vom 28.10.1926 an die Reichsregierung mit zwei ärztlichen Gutachten beigelegt."

89. DTV, Protokoll vom 1. Kongress der Textilarbeiterinnen Deutschlands, abgehalten am 11. und 12. Oktober 1926 in Gera, pp. 4-12. There was an interesting gap between male and female representatives to the congress: men had belonged to the union, on the average, for 22.8 years, while women had been members for an average of 9.3 years.

90. Ibid., p. 3. Although reproductive issues were the focus of the congress, other topics were discussed, including birth-control and abortion in the working-class; the psychology of women's factory work; women in the Betriebsräte (labor councils); and the history of the women's movement for economic and political equality with men.

Union leader Hermann Jäckel began his opening address to the congress by admitting that the labor movement had done little thus far to relieve women's workers' double burden. But he noted that it was even more difficult to solve "the problems of women's work that arise from the particularities of the female sex, the fact that menstruation..., pregnancy, and birth necessitate special protection of women." Ibid., p. 15.

91. Ibid., pp. 74, 89, 98. On abortion in Weimar Germany, see Atina Grossmann, "Abortion and Economic Crisis: The 1931 Campaign against Paragraph 218 in Germany," New German Critique 14 (Spring 1978), pp. 119-139; Julius Wolf, Mutter oder Embryo: Zum Kampf gegen die Abtreibungsparagraphen (Berlin 1930).

92. Ibid, pp. 39-40, 140. Approximately 6,000 of the participants were female textile workers from Gera.

93. Since the union leadership was still entirely male -- the first salaried female secretary was appointed in 1927 -- some critical readers have asked me whether it wasn't possible that the union made the female body an emblem only in order to confine women to their bodies/Eigenart.

94. Ibid., pp. 47-51, 54.

95. Ibid., p. 122.

96. Ibid., p. 51, 56; DTV, Protokoll 1927, p. 142.

97. Deutscher Textilarbeiterverband, Mein Arbeitstag - mein Wochenende: 150 Textilarbeiterinnen berichten! (Berlin 1930). See new edition with an excellent introduction by Alf Lüdtke (Hamburg, 1991).

98. See Lüdtke (ed.), Mein Arbeitstag, pp. 11, 12. The titles of the first two essays are: "Die Uhr rückt vor" (the clock ticks on) and "Zicke-zacke die Maschine..." (tick-tock of the machine).

99. Ibid., xxi.

100. See, for example, Atina Grossman, "The New Woman and the Rationalization of Sexuality in Weimar Germany," in: Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson (eds.), Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality (New York 1983) and "Abortion and Economic Crisis: The 1931 Campaign Against Paragraph 218 in Germany," in: Renate Bridenthal et al., When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany (New York 1985), pp. 66-86; also Cornelia Osborne, The Politics of the Body in Weimar Germany: Reproductive Rights and Duties (Ann Arbor, forthcoming 1992).

101. Ibid., p. 14.

102. See Elisabeth Domansky, "World War I as Gender Conflict in Germany," (paper presented to the "Kaiserreich" conference at University of Pennsylvania, February 1990).

103. Gagnier, Subjectivities, p. 60.

104. Gagnier, Subjectivities, p. 60. Her main source here is a collection of 160 letters written by members of the British Women's Cooperative Guild and published in 1915, entitled Maternity: Letters from Working-Women.

105. Ibid., pp. 59-60.

106. Ibid., p. 63.

107. Sewell, "Gender, History, and Deconstruction," p. 17.

108. Thomas Laqueur, Making Sex (Cambridge, MA 1990), p. 12.

109. Bordo, "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism," pp. 144-145. Here she is citing Donna Haraway's discussion of cyborgs.

110. Ibid.

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