

Introduction

Women Writing Culture is a collection of six scholarly interviews with internationally prominent scholars about feminism, rhetoric, writing, and multiculturalism. Included among these interviewees are feminist philosopher of science Sandra Harding; cultural critic and philosopher of science Donna Haraway; noted American theorist of women's epistemology Mary Belenky; African-American cultural critic bell hooks; Luce Irigaray, a major exponent of "French Feminism"; and Jean-François Lyotard, a philosopher and cultural critic who has helped to define "the postmodern condition." Donna Haraway has provided a Foreword, and Marxist cultural critic Henry Giroux has contributed an Afterword. Together, these interviews afford significant insight into these eminent scholars' perspectives on the three principal subjects indicated by the book's title—women, writing, and culture—and they also explore how women write culture through the various postmodern discourses in which they engage.

The collection begins with a conversation with Sandra Harding, who clarifies her notion of feminist standpoint theory and her well-known attempts to redefine "scientific objectivity." For Harding, rhetoric, discourse, and writing play major roles in epistemology, and she is concerned that misunderstandings about the role of rhetoric and standpoint in epistemology have led to widespread scientific illiteracy. Consequently, she sees her work as a kind of literacy project, and she speculates about how to make pedagogy in general more responsive to the contemporary American academy's heterogeneous student population.

Harding's friend and colleague in the philosophy of science, Donna Haraway, eloquently stresses the centrality of writing, of discourse, both to living in the world and to resisting systems of domination. Elucidating her concept of "cyborg writing," Haraway calls for a conception of writing that resists phallogocentric writing practices and that foregrounds the situatedness of writers. Like Harding, she believes that literacy should be a major concern of all intellectuals because literacy is "intimately implicated" in projects of

freedom and domination. And, as a cultural critic, Haraway encourages political action in all areas of life, from instituting literacy projects to interrogating the hegemonic practices of technoscience to becoming involved in writing legislation on the state and national levels.

Like Harding and Haraway, Mary Belenky is concerned with how science—social science in her case—constitutes women and women's experience from patriarchal perspectives. Rejecting the agonistic practices that characterize the male-dominated academy, she champions a model of learning and research based on cooperation and collaboration. Her extensive description of her own collaborative research projects serves as an example of the type of cooperative research she envisions replacing the competitive model so privileged by academia. Thus, Belenky, too, is concerned with issues of literacy and wishes to recast literacy as a project of mutual support and cooperation.

Literacy is especially important to bell hooks; in fact, she views literacy as essential to the future of feminist movement. She urges all feminists, despite their specific agendas, to place both literacy and social activism at the forefront of feminist thinking because true empowerment will arise only from a literate populace committed to social change. Thus, she promotes a *praxis* that, evoking the work of Paulo Freire, incorporates reflection *and* action. As a result, hooks is intimately concerned with the politics of pedagogy and calls for a reconceptualization of the teaching situation in which passion and desire are not repressed and in which students and teachers learn to become polyvocal.

All six of the interviewees in this book discuss at length issues of gender relations, but probably no one as extensively as Luce Irigaray. She calls for a new relation between man and woman that would constitute a new cultural and political "horizon," one characterized by autonomy and reciprocal respect and affection. Such a new relation would necessarily be based on a recognition of the irreducible difference between woman and man. She envisions a "horizontal transcendence" between two mature but irreducibly different subjects, woman and man. In effect, she says, inventing a new relationship between woman and man is tantamount to inventing a new socio-cultural order. The interview with Irigaray is particularly important because despite her influence in the United States, she has seldom agreed to be interviewed by English-speaking scholars.

While Jean-François Lyotard takes issue with some of Irigaray's work and claims to have an uneasy relationship with the French feminists, he is generally sympathetic to feminism and even asserts that postmodernism itself is feminist. Although he does not specifically address the work of Donna Haraway, his positions about writing and culture seem particularly in keeping with hers. Like Haraway, who espouses a cyborg writing that subverts phallogocentrism, Lyotard rejects a discourse of mastery and certainty and calls for a discourse of openness, interrogation and what he calls "passability"—a discourse he sees as essentially "feminine." Because the compulsion to seek out a constituting order that gives meaning to the world makes the philosopher complicitous with the phallocrat, Lyotard wishes to replace question-answering with question-posing.

Often in these interviews, the participants refer to the work or statements of the other interviewees, thereby creating a kind of cross-dialogue or polylogue. Thus, *Women Writing Culture* might be seen as a multi-level discussion in which, as Henry Giroux remarks in the Afterword, "these various theorists link their feminist and other political interventions to broader considerations of cultural struggle, whether it focuses on race, national identity, writing, or teaching." We hope these interviews clarify positions, provoke debate, and encourage response.

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