

1

FEMINISM, COMPOSITION, AND RE-HISTORY

BUILDING FEMINIST COMMUNITY within composition has as one of its projects the historicization of women within rhetoric and composition, historicization that includes critical work such as Cheryl Glenn's *Rhetoric Retold* and Jacqueline Jones Royster's *Traces in a Stream*,¹ as well as self-reflexive narratives of attempts to negotiate composition studies as a feminist, as in Elizabeth Flynn's serial commentary on her own 1988 "Composing as a Woman." As Suzanne Clark notes, Flynn's ongoing work "exemplifies the way much feminist work mobilizes the uncertainty produced by historical change."² The act of historicization within feminist composition studies is crucial to the formation of a site from which to speak as a feminist. Although it constitutes only one strand of conversation in contemporary composition studies regarding feminism, historicization ties intimately to each of the other strands: its projects play a key part in discussions of the status of women in the field; in the discussions of research methods that led to the work of Carol Gilligan and Mary Field Belenky (and thus to the work of many cultural feminists in composition); and, to a lesser extent, in discussions of postmodern and cultural studies approaches to composition.

This last connection is the most problematic, perhaps because of how the other connections have formed and been deployed in composition studies. That is, because of a relatively uncritical approach to the

history of the intersections of feminism and composition studies, it is difficult if not impossible to reconcile postmodern conceptions of agency with the discourse of empowerment so often present in discussions of feminist pedagogy. This uncritical approach to history is surprising, given the critical historicization that has led to such diverse work as Clark's examination of the "despised rhetoric" of sentimentality, Joann Campbell's reevaluation of Gertrude Buck, and Susan Miller's commentary on the material conditions of women within composition studies.³ Discussions of postmodern and poststructuralist feminism within composition most often have to do with the French feminists, as in the work of Lynn Worsham and Clara Juncker.⁴ While feminist compositionists have used different post-theories to good advantage in discussions of materiality and the incommensurability of theory, they do not juxtapose those two impulses. That is, feminists do not bring the tools of critical historicist analysis to bear on their own history; they do not look at their own historicist texts.

As feminists themselves have pointed out, uncritical histories too often present an "objective" god's-eye view dependent on elision for its coherence; in short, what does not fit the narrative is left out or ignored. An uncritical history of feminism in composition studies has served to contain and neutralize one of the key generative moments of public feminist discourse: the in-your-face textuality of the late-1960s radical feminists. This chapter, then, questions the historicization efforts of feminists in composition, looking to Michel Foucault's notion of genealogical history to reconfigure radical feminism's place (or lack thereof) in histories of feminism and composition. Beginning with a brief overview of Foucault's genealogical approach, I will examine the recent upsurge in interest in the historical intersections of composition and feminism; I will also explore the curious absence of radical feminism at these intersections, an absence that serves as the focal point for my study. To this end, I examine key works in this conversation, beginning with Caywood and Overing's 1987 *Teaching Writing: Pedagogy, Gender, and Equity* and Flynn's 1988 article, continuing through scattered articles by Miller, Susan Jarratt, Worsham, and others, and coming to the present with the collections edited by Louise Wetherbee Phelps and Janet Emig (*Feminine Principles*) and Jarratt and Worsham (*In Other Words*).

FOUCAULT, FEMINISM, AND GENEALOGY

Foucault's work has been a highly productive yet contested site for feminist theorists; even as they might acknowledge Foucault's importance to the development of critical insights about power and subjectivity, feminists find Foucault's gender blindness and his negation of agency problematic. Nancy Hartsock points out that postmodern theory in general does not allow for emancipatory action, a particular sticking-point for a movement such as feminism, which has as one defining feature its emphasis on liberatory action. Hartsock writes that "for those of us who have been marginalized and subjugated in various ways and who need to understand the world systematically in order to change it, postmodernist theories at their best fail to provide an alternative to the Enlightenment."⁵ In a similar vein, Sabina Lovibond questions the will to postmodernity, asking "How can anyone ask me to say goodbye to 'emancipatory metanarratives' when my own emancipation is still such a patchy, hit-and-miss affair?"⁶ Many feminist critics find it suspicious that the idea of "agency" dies out in critical thought just at the time when hitherto "unauthorized" people have a chance to wield some sort of author-ity.

It is thus that Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, with their reconceptualization of power and subjectivity, hold tenuous and somewhat contradictory positions in feminist studies. On the one hand, Foucault's argument that power inscribes, saturates, and even constitutes every human relation ties closely to feminist critiques of language and culture. On the other hand, that argument specifically challenges the very idea of emancipatory politics and individual or collective agency. That is, as in the feminist critique of postmodern theories in general, the feminist critique of Foucault reflects the seeming ideological impossibility of advocating social and political change while using a theoretical framework that denies the possibility of changing exploitative power relations.

Hartsock writes that Foucault's claim that we are all, regardless of gender, race, class, age, or sexual orientation, implicated in the deployment of unequal power relations ultimately leads to critical paralysis. That is, she argues, by following Foucault's insistence on metaphors of webs and nets of power (instead of structures of domination), "we are led to conclude merely that each of us both dominates and is dominated. We

are all responsible, and so in a sense no one is responsible. Thus, the question of how to analyze structures of domination is obscured.”⁷ In short, if power saturates every relation, there is no place outside power from which to resist. At the same time, Foucault implies that there is no real possibility of radical resistance inside the web of power relations; at best, we can only reform the conditions under which our bodies are made docile. As Monique Deveaux writes, “Foucault’s extreme reluctance to attribute specific agency to subjects in his early accounts of power results in a portrayal of individuals as passive bodies, constituted by power and immobilized in a society of discipline.”⁸

Even writers who ultimately reject the use of Foucault for feminism, however, acknowledge that his ideas have influenced contemporary feminist theory greatly. In composition, Foucaultian ideas have shaped material analyses of subjects such as classroom layout and freshman composition programs. In *Working Theory*, Judith Goleman uses the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Louis Althusser to show the liminal space of practice/theory as a site for textual agency; underneath her “direct dialogues” with these theorists, however, she relies upon Foucault’s analysis of the relations of power, knowledge, and discourse to orient her project.⁹ In “On the Subjects of Class and Gender in ‘The Literacy Letters’” (1989), Linda Brodkey uses an exchange of letters between graduate student teachers of basic writing and ABE (Adult Basic Education) students to explore the possibility of discursive resistance within a Foucaultian framework. My purpose in offering these examples of productive use of Foucault’s work is not to rehabilitate that work for feminists, or to suggest that feminist concerns about the work are unfounded. Rather, it is to note that certain insoluble tensions exist in such use and that it is crucial that we acknowledge the tensions without rejecting certain productive possibilities offered through Foucault.

For the purposes of my own project, I draw from Foucault’s revisioning of history, a revision produced through a genealogical approach to the past. While Enlightenment thought positions history as a coherent trajectory supported by a metaphysical belief in “truth,” Foucault presents a genealogical model of history that “points to the inequality of forces as the source of values or the work of resentment in the production of the objective world.”¹⁰ The philosophy of history (against which Foucault posits his genealogical method) depends on a cause-effect view of historical events and on

the idea of some metaphysical origin from which we came and to which we go. That is, as Foucault writes in “*Theatrum Philosophicum*,” the philosophy of history:

encloses the event in a cyclical pattern of time. Its error is grammatical; it treats the present as framed by the past and future: the present is a former future where its form was prepared and the past, which will occur in the future, preserves the identity of its content. First, this sense of the present requires a logic of essences (which establishes the present in memory) and of concepts (where the present is established as a knowledge of the future), and then a metaphysics of a crowned and coherent cosmos, of a hierarchical world.¹¹

I quote this passage at some length because it contains several key points for any critical examination of the intersection of feminism, composition, and history. First, teleological history offers no way to account for singularity—present events happen because of a past condition, past events happened because of a prior condition. What does not fit in that coherent causal whole is a curiosity, not part of history; in fact, as in the case of radical feminism in the history of composition studies, it may be invisible. Genealogies, in contrast, are elucidations of anomaly, narratives that do not “neglect the vicissitudes of history.”¹² Second, the dependence on the logic of essence and concept informs much of the feminist conversation in composition. Finally, while it is an overstatement to claim that feminists in composition always rely on a metaphysics of hierarchy to frame their own arguments, it is certainly true that the metaphysics of hierarchy almost always play a part in any liberatory movement. Feminism is no exception; like the issues of individual agency and emancipatory action, the metaphysics of hierarchy serve as a site of much contention in feminist discussion of Foucault.

The main advantage to a Foucaultian approach to history is that it acknowledges the rhetoricity of historicization itself. The choices that any history makes about singularity, essence, and the metaphysics of hierarchy are rhetorical choices, invested heavily in questions of who writes the histories, who reads them, and the purposes for which the writing and reading are done. Feminists in composition have written their history in specific ways to accomplish specific ends; indeed, one reason that radical feminism disappears from current discussions of feminism and composition studies is that 1960s feminisms are often collapsed into a manageable

whole on our way to the work of Carol Gilligan and the Belenky collaborative.¹³ My statement is by no means an indictment of compositionists in particular; indeed, as Alice Echols demonstrates in her *Daring to Be Bad*, radical feminism dissipated into a more general, shorthand “feminism” in part because of its own theoretical limitations, its problematic universalism, and its status *as* radical—that is, as Echols writes, it suffered “the fate of all social change movements.”¹⁴

I would contend, however, that the affinity of the work of Gilligan and the Belenky collaborative with cultural feminism *necessarily* contributes to the absence of radical feminism in discussions of composition. It is difficult to overstate the influence of these works in feminist developmental psychology on feminist composition studies. Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (1982) challenged then-prevailing assumptions about moral development, positing that women’s moral development was substantially different from men’s; and the Belenky collaborative’s *Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (1986), explored the ways in which “gender influences knowing and learning.”¹⁵ The idea of “women’s different ways” forms a crucial connection between feminist developmental psychology and cultural feminist rhetoric as it appears in contemporary rhetoric and composition scholarship; this connection, in turn, contributes to a loss of a sense of critical agency in writing classrooms, through the reification of the ideas of teacher-as-mother, writing-as-expression, and classroom-as-nurturing space.

THE METAPHYSICS OF “WOMEN’S WAYS” OF WRITING

It is not my intent to provide a comprehensive overview of feminism and composition studies, but instead to examine, specifically, how these two fields have defined “feminism” and “women” in the context of writing instruction. These definitions have served to perpetuate a cultural feminist ideology in feminist composition studies, an ideology that serves as the justifying narrative behind the radical-free history of feminism and composition. When radical feminism *does* appear in histories of feminism and composition, it is often reduced to a mishistoricized tale of consciousness-raising groups and a problematic tendency to universalize. This construction of radical feminism serves a twofold purpose: it effectively removes radical feminism from real critique,

since our misapprehension creates a “straw feminist,” as it were, and it keeps us from obtaining those insights we might otherwise gain from radical feminist textuality.

Some reexamination of earlier texts is necessary to demonstrate the extent to which feminist composition studies depends upon humanist assumptions about individual agency and about history. In effect, I will sketch out the ways in which feminist composition studies has relied on a teleological, cyclical pattern of time in order to present the “coherent cosmos” of our discipline. My purpose in this section, therefore, is twofold. First, I wish to examine the particular ways in which these texts have served to present “feminism” to the larger composition community; feminism in these texts is cultural feminism, marked by its valorization of “women’s ways,” and in composition marked by a “happy marriage” to expressivist thought.¹⁶ Second, I wish to show how this valorization continues to shape feminist thought in composition, most notably in Phelps and Emig’s recent collection, *Feminine Principles and Women’s Experience in American Composition and Rhetoric*. Many of the collection’s individual authors do not position themselves as cultural feminists: Evelyn Ashton-Jones’s gender critique of collaborative learning and Patricia Bizzell’s historicist “Praising Folly: Constructing a Postmodern Rhetorical Authority as a Woman,” for example, both focus on positionality within discourses of power rather than on revaluing an undervalued “female nature.” However, the editors of the collection make it clear that *they* have framed their collection according to cultural feminist values. Phelps and Emig write that their feminism “depended powerfully on constantly negotiating” the “dynamic tension [of] the complementary principles defined in our culture as feminine and masculine.”¹⁷ Their vision of their collection, if not the collection itself, participates in the creation of a coherent, causally oriented march through composition’s history that seems to be the focus of feminist historicization projects, and to a lesser extent the focus of attempts to incorporate feminist pedagogy into the composition classroom.

According to cultural feminists in composition, “women’s ways” and “feminine principles,” coherent through the time and space of decades of composition pedagogy, have been systematically ignored. That is, as Eileen E. Schell writes:

cultural feminists argue that feminine values have been denigrated and superseded by masculine values such as aggressiveness, confrontation,

control, competition, domination, and physical violence. To reverse the perpetuation of harmful masculine values, cultural feminists contend that all people—men and women alike—should emulate feminine values: nurturance, supportiveness, interdependence, and nondominance.¹⁸

A generous interpretation of this stance would note that cultural feminists in composition draw from Gayatri Spivak, that is, they argue that to reclaim women's ways for the field requires a "strategic essentialism" designed to subvert the patriarchal, hierarchical principles of current-traditional rhetoric. However, because this essentialism depends on present-tense woman framed by past and future women with historically coherent "ways of being," it serves more to *perpetuate* the "crowned and coherent cosmos" than to *subvert* it. Rather than positing essentialism as a temporary and rhetorically bound strategy, feminist histories of rhetoric and composition neglect "the vicissitudes of history," as Foucault might say.¹⁹ In other words, these histories neglect the curiosities, the anomalies, and the singular parts that do not "fit" into the ahistorical, a-rhetorical cosmos of cultural feminist composition.

The problematic contemporary conversation about the intersections of feminism and composition studies, as most scholars would attest, opens with two texts: 1987's *Teaching Writing: Pedagogy, Gender, and Equity*, a collection edited by Cynthia L. Caywood and Gillian R. Overing, and Flynn's 1988 "Composing as a Woman." Both texts draw heavily from the work of Nancy Chodorow, Carol Gilligan, and the group of scholars who collaborated on *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule). Each of these texts, in turn, relies upon a logic of essence and concept to expand the borders of (but not radically change) the humanist subject. As Laura Brady notes in "The Reproduction of Othering," the synecdochal use of experience as evidence in Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, and *Women's Ways of Knowing* makes use of a strategic essentialism. In all three texts, Brady writes, "individual narratives became the basis for generalizations about the collective identity of woman"; she further argues that repeated citation of these works has "institutionalized a popular concept of the category of woman, which has helped create a newly established set of gender conventions that both feminists and antifeminists appropriate."²⁰

Brady uses Michel de Certeau's distinction between strategies and tactics, pointing out that feminism as both an "institution" and a "counterinstitutional movement" works strategically and tactically. As tactics become visible and bear repetition, they become strategies; thus, Brady argues, "the work of Chodorow, Gilligan, and the Belenky collaborative continues to have a strategic value but that it has lost much of its interventionary (tactical) use for contemporary feminist composition theory."²¹ Like the work of Chodorow, Gilligan, and the Belenky collaborative, *Teaching Writing* and "Composing as a Woman" makes the move from tactical to strategic value through repeated citation. In addition, they write a history that insists that the category of woman not only exists in a particular way, but that it has always existed in that way. "Woman" as described in the work of Chodorow, Gilligan, and the Belenky collaborative becomes naturalized through its encounters with feminist compositionists.

Caywood and Overing's *Teaching Writing* makes a book-length claim, spanning each of the articles within the volume, that process-oriented collaborative pedagogy and feminist goals are closely related. Schell writes that in the book, "female students' subjectivities are represented as buried treasure, which must be brought to light with the assistance of the feminist teacher."²² The collection's claim, then, relies on an uncritical acceptance of the idea of an individual voice and an authentic self that can be articulated in writing; given the appropriate (feminist or process) pedagogy, writing classrooms can change not only how one writes but who one is when one writes. Overall, contributors to *Teaching Writing* suggest that feminist classrooms can counteract patriarchal pedagogy's "emphasis on hierarchy, competition, and control."²³ In their introduction to the collection, for example, Caywood and Overing write that the key relation between feminism and composition is "the relation between revisionist critiques of traditional writing theory and the feminist critique of masculinist, patriarchal ways of being."²⁴ Further, they write that "the process model, insofar as it facilitates and legitimizes the fullest expression of the individual voice, is compatible with the feminist revisioning of hierarchy, if not essential to it."²⁵ In their own contribution to the book, "Writing Across the Curriculum: a Model for a Workshop and a Call for Change," they write that process pedagogy abandons the ideas of "authority" and "model" in favor of "facilitator" and "process," a change that creates a "less-structured, less rigidly

hierarchical, revalued, collaborative, open-ended approach” that “is compatible with feminism, if not feminist in and of itself.”²⁶

Caywood and Overing’s claim that feminist (and process) pedagogy can facilitate the development of the individual woman’s voice—which is and has always been (essentially) the voice of a noncompetitive, maternal-thinking nurturer—forms a key component of almost every essay in the collection. In “Women Writing,” for example, Wendy Goulston writes that traditional (non-process) writing pedagogies prevent women students from writing authentically, since “the woman who excels at school learns to write pleasing papers for professors, [but] she does not write them from her whole ‘center.’”²⁷ Similarly, Rebecca Blevins Faery’s “Women and Writing Across the Curriculum: Learning and Liberation” explores how the process model of writing makes students more active learners, which is “particularly important for women students, to help them overcome the tendencies toward passivity and intellectual dependence and timidity which are their cultural heritage.”²⁸ In her contribution to the anthology, Carol A. Stanger writes that collaborative learning is a feminist pedagogy in that it “taps learners’ early experience with their mothers.”²⁹ Elisabeth Däumer and Sandra Runzo examine the “maternal perspective” in Janet Emig’s work and valorize a “maternal teacher” who “attempts to meet students on their own grounds, to individualize instruction, and to allow for self-sponsored writing by encouraging students to interact as much with each other as with the instructor.”³⁰ While Däumer and Runzo note that “mothering” has not been adequately critiqued, particularly the role of the mother as enforcer of traditional femininity, their essay spends a good deal of time recuperating “maternal teaching” as that which more adequately addresses the needs of women’s voices, both as teachers and students.³¹

Like Caywood and Overing’s collection, Flynn’s “Composing as a Woman” valorizes maternal teaching and emphasizes the newly feminized humanist subject as justified by a logic of essence. Flynn claims that “composition specialists replace the figure of the authoritative father with an image of a nurturing mother”³² and suggests that women and men write differently because of their different experiences with their mothers. Further, like the essays in *Teaching Writing*, Flynn’s early work presents a feminism grounded in the work of Chodorow, Gilligan, and the Belenky collaborative, all of which she claims is “especially relevant to a feminist consideration of student writing.”³³ She writes

that scholars should not assume that “males and females use language in identical ways or represent the world in a similar fashion. And if their writing strategies and patterns of representation do differ, then ignoring those differences almost certainly means a suppression of women’s separate ways of thinking and writing.”³⁴ It is important to note that Flynn distances herself (in a later article) from the claim that process pedagogy and feminist pedagogy are necessarily synonymous. As Clark writes in response to several articles citing Flynn in 1998’s *Feminism and Composition Studies: In Other Words*:

the difference between the Flynn of “Composing as a Woman” and the Flynn of the 1995 review illustrates the danger of taking woman out of history, text out of context. It illustrates the danger of losing sight of the rhetorical situation. Abandoning the rhetorical approach is fatal, since that approach is the best contribution to feminism that women in composition can make.³⁵

“Composing as a Woman,” along with Flynn’s later work, addresses a serious inattention to the intersections of gender and discourse in composition studies, a phenomenon that Flynn herself points to when she writes that at the time of the article, “the fields of feminist studies and composition studies have not engaged each other in a serious or systematic way.”³⁶ Well over a decade later, Flynn’s assessment still holds true, but equally lasting is her contribution to the problematic historicization of feminism in composition studies. Her early article, drawing its energy from the reinscription and naturalization of gender roles (essence) and an elision of difference in favor of universalized woman, makes the history of feminism and composition coherent, causal, dependent on an origin of grace (gender-balanced pedagogy) from which we have fallen.

More importantly, the nurturing, maternal-thinking woman constructed as “natural” in texts such as “Composing as a Woman,” *Teaching Writing*, and others appears as the inevitable outcome of feminist history, a metaphysical copy of the “original” woman whose presence in the past ensures, through the causal coherence of teleological history, her presence in the present. That is, the ways in which feminist compositionists tell the history of feminism in composition creates a *particular* feminism and a *particular* composition, both of which depend on their prior justification to explain their current situation. What cannot be

accounted for in those histories is rendered unnatural, perverse, or invisible. A particular aporia in this history is radical feminism which, if it is alluded to at all, is presented uncritically. In "Silences: Feminist Language Research and the Teaching of Writing," for example, Pamela J. Annas offers a short history of the intersections of contemporary feminism and writing in order to create a past that frames the present as something inevitable and thus natural. Annas's particular interest in the radical feminists is their commitment to consciousness-raising. Beginning with the works of Betty Friedan and Tillie Olsen, Annas moves to a discussion of late 1960s consciousness-raising groups, in which (according to Annas) women talked, listened, and then found "common threads" in their own stories and other women's. Annas writes that the key discursive development here was "a form of discourse . . . based on cooperation and augmentation rather than competitiveness, on dialogue rather than hierarchy."³⁷ Similarly, in a 1990 article, Joy Ritchie cautions against "a return to naïve consciousness-raising groups," which she sets in opposition to a desire for "historical, critical analysis and, thus, for action."³⁸

Consciousness-raising is not the only trace left of the radical feminists; feminist compositionists occasionally invoke radical feminism in order to dissociate themselves from its synecdochal, difference-erasing view of women's experience, that is, the belief in women's "sisterhood." Harriet Malinowitz, for example, in her 1998 "A Feminist Critique of Writing in the Disciplines," claims that the "early second wave of feminism based much of its thinking" on the belief that local knowledge is unitary, "and feminism has been reeling and learning from that mistake ever since."³⁹ She writes that much second-wave feminist writing "held that the category of women signaled not only a collective of bodies bound together by the fact of their common oppression but also an epistemological location—that is, it constituted a site of local knowledge (in the spiritual or experiential, not geographical, sense)."⁴⁰ Feminist composition scholarship is peppered with such quick, uncritical characterizations of the radical feminist movement and its discursive tactics, leaving in question the extent to which those characterizations are true and to what ends these tactics were employed. In the specific case of consciousness-raising, these quick takes construct a self-justifying past, a shorthand depiction of second-wave feminism that ignores both the public-directed ends of consciousness-raising groups and the extremely contentious discussions of the purpose and consciousness-

raising that took place at the time the groups existed. That is, a common concern about consciousness-raising groups was that they existed only to provide a space for self-actualization for white, middle-class women. However, radical feminists saw consciousness-raising as only a first step toward liberation; the necessary second step was putting that newly raised consciousness into direct protest and often agonistic public action. In "Catching the Fire," for example, former Redstocking Rosalyn Fraad Baxandall writes that her group's consciousness-raising sessions often led to direct political protest. "Armed with our critique of marriage," she writes of one instance, "we decided to invade [with WITCH] a commercial bridal fair at Madison Square Garden. Our flyer said 'Confront the Whoremakers'"⁴¹

Not all feminist compositionists present the uncritical, shorthand view of radical feminism so prevalent in the field. Jarratt, for example, in her introduction to *Feminism and Composition Studies: In Other Words*, writes that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, consciousness-raising groups provided a space in which women not only "told their stories," but "made the personal political";⁴² this move from personal revelation to public and political action was the *raison d'être* of consciousness-raising groups, at least according to the radical feminists. Jarratt does address the universalizing pull of radical feminist theory, writing that "as the metaphor of sisterhood reached the limits of its usefulness as a political gathering place for feminists in the second wave, this figure began to obscure more than it revealed, hiding differences under wraps, suggesting that all women had common experiences, goals, and languages."⁴³ Worsham offers a slightly different take on "sisterhood" in her "After Words" in the same volume, noting that second-wave feminists understood the metaphor of sisterhood "as a symbol of unity that encompassed all women and still acknowledged their diversity."⁴⁴

It is important to note that Jarratt, Worsham, and other feminists have problematized the conversation about feminism and writing pedagogy almost from the time that the conversation began. Indeed, the discussions of feminism and composition have never presented unitary visions of a happy convergence of process pedagogy and women in the classroom. *Teaching Writing* and "Composing as a Woman" appeared only a short time before more constructivist approaches to feminism appeared in composition studies, most notably a special issue of *JAC: Journal of Advanced Composition* focusing on gender, culture, and ideology in 1990,

and 1991's *Contending with Words: Composition and Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age*, which contains both Jarratt's "Feminism and Composition: The Case for Conflict" and Worsham's "Writing against Writing: The Predicament of *Écriture Féminine* in Composition Studies." In the special issue of *JAC*, guest-edited by Ashton-Jones, articles range from a Ritchie's critique of essentialist thinking in feminist pedagogy (containing as it does the previous unfortunate quick reference to consciousness-raising) to Mary Kupiec Cayton's exploration of women's writing blocks. Like the authors in *Teaching Writing*, the authors in *JAC* 10.2 draw some theoretical energy from the work of Gilligan and the Belenky collaborative; however, they do not use that energy to posit a coherent, naturalized narrative of women in composition. In "No Exit: A Play of Literacy and Gender," for example, Don Kraemer writes warily of the cultural feminist drive to valorize "women's ways," noting that

Polarities like symbolic activity versus synecdochic activity, male language versus female language, game world versus nongame world—these distinctions may be necessary and productive of discourse, but they are not foundational. They don't stay in place or guarantee our politics. It is perhaps inevitable but surely mistaken to assign permanent plus and minus values to such distinctions . . .⁴⁵

Likewise, Wendy Bishop, in "Learning Our Own Ways to Situate Composition and Feminist Studies in the English Department," mentions *Women's Ways of Knowing* as just one of several possible approaches to rethinking how feminist compositionists mentor graduate students.

Jarratt, in her essay in *Contending with Words*, is similarly cautious about women's ways and feminine principles. Jarratt writes that the "powerful potential" of the connections between composition and feminism remains only potential as long as we "decline to contend with words."⁴⁶ That is, she writes that viewing and teaching agonistic discourse solely as the realm of the masculine leaves students "insufficiently [*sic*] prepared to negotiate the oppressive discourses of racism, sexism, and classism surfacing in the composition classroom" because teachers "spend too little time helping their students learn how to argue about public issues—making the turn from the personal back out to the public."⁴⁷ Worsham's essay in the same volume questions the "will to pedagogy," or the impulse to domesticate theory through see-

ing it only “as a source for new textual and pedagogical models and strategies.”⁴⁸ Specifically, Worsham’s argument should give pause to feminist compositionists looking to French feminism as a justification for teaching women’s ways in the writing classroom.

In the late 1990s, the appearance of Phelps and Emig’s *Feminine Principles and Women’s Experience* collection and Jarratt and Worsham’s *Feminism and Composition Studies* collection—two volumes with very different editorial frameworks, to be sure—illustrates the ongoing tension between feminist compositionists about how to define, theorize, and teach writing. The Phelps and Emig collection, as the editors almost explicitly point out, descends from the late 1980s work of Caywood, Overing, and Flynn. Phelps and Emig justify their use of “feminine” in the book’s title (instead of “feminist”) by claiming that “feminine” is the underlying, original term. “In fact,” they write, “much of what is called, in our volume and elsewhere *feminist* seems to us to be claims and disclaimers about the contested feminine—women’s different ways of knowing, writing, teaching, learning, and so on.”⁴⁹ Whether the articles in the collection adhere to that vision is another matter; the volume begins, for example, with Ashton-Jones’s critique of the uncritical view of collaborative learning that allows feminists to draw parallels between it and feminist pedagogy. Ashton-Jones writes that it “takes a logical leap of questionable validity to conclude that removing the teacher-authority from the scene of meaning making effectively removes all traces of the patriarchal presence.”⁵⁰ Further, she argues, even if one assumes that collaborative learning parallels feminist discourse, “it remains to be seen whether men and women function on equal terms within the province of the group itself.”⁵¹ However, other essays in the collection, most notably Janice Hays’s “Intellectual Parenting and a Developmental Feminist Pedagogy of Writing” obviously make use of the theoretical constructs valued by the collections’ editors.

Jarratt and Worsham’s *Feminism and Composition: In Other Words* contributes more than its editors’ introduction and afterwards to the critique of cultural feminist pedagogy. In “Riding Long Coattails, Subverting Tradition: The Tricky Business of Feminists Teaching Rhetoric(s),” Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald reexamine two recent courses that they taught to explore what it means to teach rhetoric as a feminist. Each of the courses examined rhetorical history, in both its exclusive canonical form and in its interruptions, interruptions offered by feminist recovery projects. Ritchie and Ronald write that one tension in

recovery work is that too often, the search for women's texts includes an essentialist search for a woman's voice. That is, they write, readings in women's rhetoric "had to be recovered in order to redress their absence, but resisted so that students would not define women's writing as a unified, seamless whole tied to an essential female body."⁵² However, they also warn that we must "recognize that recovery is often necessarily accompanied by an essentialist celebration of women's rhetoric."⁵³ Specifically, just as one of their editors had argued years earlier, Ritchie and Ronald worry that dividing rhetorical strategies into masculine and feminine modes both denies women's use of agonistic discourse through history and limits their abilities to intervene today. That is, they write, such division "not only may be inaccurate but also may limit women's rhetorical options and ignore the rhetorical power of much of women's writing throughout history."⁵⁴ Similarly, Schell's essay in the Jarratt/Worsham collection reexamines "femininism," a neologism created by Flynn to describe the "conscious awareness of women's special perspectives and problems and the commitment to gender equity."⁵⁵ Placing "femininism" in the context of Nel Noddings's ethics of care, Schell argues that the approach, "although compelling, may reinforce rather than critique or transform patriarchal structures."⁵⁶

It is thus that the current conversations about feminism and composition continue. The Phelps and Emig collection and the Jarratt and Worsham collection appear to have descended separately from the same history, a history that depends less on the question of whether one engages in strategic essentialism than on the inevitability of women writing now, in this way, because of how compositionists think women wrote before. In short, this history repeats the "grammatical error" noted by Foucault: it relies on a "logic of essences," a "logic of concept," and, finally, "a metaphysics of a crowned and coherent cosmos" in order to legitimate itself *as* history.⁵⁷

Because of the drive to legitimize ourselves within academe, and because, perhaps, we have thrown in our lot with academic feminism rather than "street" feminism, we have remained curiously silent on the subject of the public textuality of second-wave feminism. It is thus heartening to note that many compositionists have begun feminist material critiques of the field, searching something beyond metaphysics both inside the classroom and out of it. Schell's essay exists as one such critique; in it, she argues that emphasizing an ethics of care, as many cultural feminists do, "may prevent feminists from addressing

one of the most serious gender problems we face in composition studies: the relegating of women to contingent (part-time and non-tenure-track) writing instructorships.”⁵⁸ Citing Miller’s “Feminization of Composition,” Schell urges feminist compositionists to pay attention to how “institutional scripts cast women teachers as nurturers . . . thus making it problematic for feminists to continue advocating nurturant behavior as a form of empowerment.”⁵⁹

Both *Feminine Principles* and *Feminism and Composition Studies* contain discussions of the material conditions of women teaching, a conversation begun by Miller over a decade ago in her *Textual Carnivals*, in which she described the situation of composition as the “sad woman in the basement,” and continued in “The Feminization of Composition” and other work. Other writers such as Flynn and Sharon Crowley have taken up the discussion, creating such a significant thread in the conversation about feminism and composition that Phelps refers to the concept of the feminization of composition as a “truism.” In her own contribution to the *Feminine Principles* collection, Phelps explores the implications of being a female administrator, acknowledging that composition is “a field dominated in numbers by women, concerned with a subject and a teaching practice perceived by many academics and the public as low-status, elementary, service-oriented, menial ‘women’s work.’”⁶⁰

While the current material critiques of composition certainly form an important part of the conversation about feminism and composition, they are not enough in themselves to help us escape the clutches of a history that, in valorizing “women’s ways,” ignores or misrepresents women’s *different* ways. The singularity of the radical feminist movement, with its commitment to direct, textual, and often agonistic action, does not exist as part of the coherent narrative of feminism and composition, in which consciousness-raising groups led to our collaborative pedagogy and false universalization led to our enlightenment. Radical feminism does not contribute to the causal relation demanded by the teleological histories of feminism and composition; radical feminism, unless it is mis-historicized, cannot prejustify the present condition of the feminist writing classroom. And thus we are left to reinvent the feminist wheel; many of the debates over essentialism, diversity, and “feminine principles” that we find in contemporary scholarship appeared in print 30 years ago. In the late 1960s, as Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Ann Snitow write, critiques of “gender-as-monocause and

sisterhood-as-monocure came immediately from many locations.”⁶¹ To what do we owe our historical blind spot, if not to the need to justify our present in terms of our created past?

PRESENT TENSE: WHAT'S STILL MISSING

Certainly, feminism and composition encompasses more textual terrain than the handful of books and articles I have examined here; my point in such an examination, however, is not to produce an exhaustive history, but instead to produce a *telling* history, one that gives us its narrative through its repeated citation of the tropes of the natural, maternal-thinking woman and the nurturing, expressivist-oriented collaborative classroom that grew out of a neutralized radical feminist movement. While we may have started to engage feminism in what Flynn might call a “serious way,” there is much of the engagement left unfinished. Currently, the questions about feminism in composition have to do with how women write. Do they write differently from men? What are the conditions of women teaching? Is there a women’s language? What is a women’s rhetoric? What women rhetoricians should we add to the history of rhetoric? The questions that we have not yet asked or answered are questions of textuality: to what political movements have women contributed? What texts did they produce, for what purpose? What were the conditions of political textual action? In short, we do not look enough outside the limits of our composition-bound history.

For contemporary feminist compositionists, it appears that radical second-wave feminism consists of consciousness-raising and a problematic tendency to universalize personal experience; in each case, radical feminism, in all its complication and division, exists only insofar as it justifies the present-tense of feminism and composition. The history that we tell becomes the present that we value, and the present that we tell becomes the history that we value. That is, either the radical feminists’ consciousness-raising groups provide the utopian model for the feminist collaborative classroom, or their shortsighted universalizing tendencies are what we, having made “progress” in our feminist thought, now work against. In either case, the radical feminists are mishistoricized, dismissed too quickly as middle-class, consciousness-raising, essentializing white women, a construction that only touches

the surface of the radical feminist movement and that does not address at all the unique textual and discursive action that was part and parcel of the movement. It is not my intent to dismiss the criticisms of radical feminism or to hold the radical feminists up as the “true” or “original” feminists to our own pale imitations. Rather, it is to note radical feminism as an anomaly, a phantasm that exceeds the limitations of its history as told by many contemporary feminist compositionists. What we include in our histories are the places where radical feminism “touches down” on those histories’ grammatical error—where it reinforces the argument *we already want to make* about collaborative pedagogy, or women’s ways, or difference.