CHAPTER 1

Putting Feminist Theory to Work

At a conference on Sex, Race and Globalisation in 2002, two of us, who had both presented work on Filipino overseas contract workers, were asked to reflect on the melodramatic nature of our presentations. The question was not elaborated but I understood it to be a comment on our heavy reliance on emotional testimonials from Filipina domestic workers and their family members, and our own efforts to draw in the audience emotionally through direct quotation and vivid, descriptions of the depth of feeling with which the testimonials were given. As we quoted and mimed domestic workers' words, it is possible that we were producing an academic version of 'the weepies'.

The question articulated for me what had been only vague impressions about the artfulness of the storytelling of the Filipino domestic workers with whom I have worked in Vancouver. Domestic workers often told rich, compelling stories about hardship and employer abuse. They framed their fears of returning home in a box, rather than an airline passenger seat, within stories of the real-life fates of Sarah Balabagan and Flor Contemplación. They told stories of local, exploitative entrepreneurs who preyed upon naïve, newly arrived domestic workers. These included a salesman who sold expensive sets of unnecessary tableware to live-in caregivers, and others who persuaded domestic workers to buy costly insurance policies by cynically playing up their fears of physical vulnerability and feelings of responsibility for family in the Philippines. In some of these stories, pleasure was taken in the absurdity of life. One story described the process of literally assembling the local cast of villains at a fundraising raffle organised by a Filipina women's group. The prizes for the raffle consisted of the very goods and services that the predatory entrepreneurs ordinarily sold to domestic workers. Part of the pleasure of this story for me – beyond staging a black joke at the entrepreneurs' expense – was the process of rendering real life as truly fantastical. That my own writing might have taken on characteristics of a genre of excess (L. Williams 1991) seemed an observation worthy of consideration.

To have one's academic work characterised as melodramatic is not,

on first reflection, a compliment. Melodrama is often conceived as low, sentimental 'schmaltz' that uses manipulative, somewhat dishonest techniques to stimulate response (Mendelsohn 2003). Melodrama operates through simplified renderings of easily identifiable villains and hero(in)es. The characters have little complexity or depth. In Peter Brooks' phrasing, the logic of the excluded middle is 'the very logic of melodrama' (1976: 18). Mendelsohn's concern about what appears to be a wider cultural return to melodrama in the United States in recent years turns around its political implications, all too apparent in the language of 'the axis of evil' and' coalitions of the willing'. Excess emotionalism and simplified moralistic stories about villains and vulnerable hero(in)es do not provide the means for distanced, dispassionate and, above all, nuanced critical thought. Further, melodramatic narratives typically reach a resolution by recognising and recovering the hero(in)es' virtue, and punishing and expelling evil. 'It works to steel men [sic] for resistance, it keeps him going in the face of threat' (Brooks 1976: 206). But melodramatic resolution involves purification rather than altering the societal context or working towards reconciliation between protagonists. Thus melodrama contains within it a politics of restoration rather than social transformation.

And yet domestic workers with whom I have worked over the last decade are anything but committed to conserving the status quo, and critics of Filipino-American fiction often note the revolutionary potential of a kind of excess they detect in some of this writing. The carnivalesque juxtaposition of official documents and popular forms, such as gossip and melodrama, is used within this fiction to destabilise official histories because it has the effect of rendering official accounts as fabrications or fabulations. The pastiche of melodrama and documentary evidence thus opens a space to tell other, non-official, counter-histories of the Philippines (Bake-Cortes 1995; Lowe 1996a: 113). Feminist critics more generally have been alert to the gendering of traditional interpretations of melodrama. Rey Chow, for example, counters the negative interpretation of the emotionalism of melodrama by arguing that it can offer an 'enlarged and amplified' view of sentimental emotions that causes not a mindless identification, but a mixture of distant fascination and immediate bodily reaction. Feminists have been particularly attentive to the way that melodrama involves audiences' bodies in a mimetic way: 'we lose control of our bodies – we cry' (Chow 1996b: 214). Although it is precisely this embodied reaction that leads to criticisms of melodrama as manipulative,

feminists such as Chow have been loathe to theorise the audience/spectator as passive and easily manipulated, and invite fuller consideration of this 'body genre' (L. Williams 1991).

I begin with this story about stories because it encapsulates many of the themes and methodologies pursued more systematically throughout the book. Just as feminist theorists have rethought conventional approaches to melodrama, this is a book that puts feminist theory to work on non- or not explicitly feminist theory, and returns this theorising repeatedly to a case study of Filipino domestic workers in Vancouver, Canada. The question that recurs throughout this book concerns the prospects of elaborating a vigorous materialist transnational feminism. There is now a voluminous literature on this topic, but what possibly distinguishes my approach is an insistence on bringing scholarly debate to bear on the concrete struggles of domestic workers. Simply, I put feminist theory – and especially poststructural theory, which many feminists have taken as irrelevant to practical political organising – to work in this concrete case to see how well it works, and what it is capable of producing. I will continue to consider how my theorising itself may have been written by conventions within and beyond the case material. But, just as my conference interlocutor productively invited me to examine my interpretation in fresh ways through a different theoretical lens, I hold an appreciation for the empirical in tension with a respect for the work that theorists can and have the responsibility to do. A distinctive characteristic of my particular theoretical lens comes from my disciplinary location in geography.[1] Like social theorists more generally, feminists have tended to think about process through time. Rethinking social processes through space (what geographers now call space-time)[2] offers opportunities to side-step some unproductive feminist standoffs about, for instance, the materiality of discourse and the possibilities of universal norms across difference.

I have found the case study of domestic workers in Vancouver to be especially productive to think with and through. I began to work on this topic precisely because of the discomfort it created for me – as a middle-class white woman with a young child. The figure of the racialised domestic worker forces white middle-class feminists to face their privilege and think concretely about the difficulties of feminist alliance, especially because their gains in gender equity in the labour market (such as they are) often rest on the availability of low-waged domestic labour. Furthermore, the complexities go beyond this; Ann Stoler (1995), for instance, argues that modern discourses of bourgeois femininity historically have been

intimately interwoven with the figure of the racialised domestic servant. From another perspective, I was also intrigued by claims that domestic workers possess a type of 'doubled vision', forced as they are to move between their own intimate worlds, and those of their employers. To cite one of the more dramatic claims, Bhabha has argued that Filipino migrants by the late twentieth century 'embody the Benjaminian "present": that moment blasted out of the continuum of history'. As subjects of 'cultural displacement and social discrimination', he argues that they become 'the best historical witnesses' and' are the grounds on which Frantz Fanon . . . locates an agency of empowerment' (1994: 8).

Bhabha's phrasing also suggests how awkward it might be to bring the abstractions of academic theory to practical circumstances. Oren Yiftachel tells a story of a visit by a delegation of British geographers to Israel/Palestine in 1995. He writes that the British geographers presented their work, which reflected the most current of theoretical concerns, on 'sexuality in the city, men's magazines . . . the discursive construction of "children" and the body. . .' The Israelis and Palestinians presented work that 'invariably focused on the evolving geography of their troubled land' (2003: 140). After a few days of meetings, a British geographer reportedly banged on the table in despair, declaring, 'please, no more presentations on Arabs and Jews, please! We have had enough of this conflict!' (140). This is a funny story. And it is not a funny story. Yiftachel contrasts the 'oversophisticated language' of the British geographers to the empirical work of the locals, and tells a story of a failure to connect.[3]

Rather than such an awkward encounter, I am hoping to force a closer interaction between feminist theory and empirical analyses of domestic workers. Like the locals in Yiftachel's story, I stay with the same empirical problem, and continuously re-examine it with different theoretical instruments ,at hand. This is one way of expressing the fact that this is not an empirical situation from which domestic workers can walk away. Domestic workers have limited opportunities for registering that they have had 'enough of this conflict', and no inclination to move on to another empirical focus. As much as an author is able, I am attempting to force the reader into a longer, more lasting, closer association, from which there is no immediate release.

There are also aspects intrinsic to the case study that force feminist theory into a close encounter. Let me briefly elaborate four. First, one criticism of the 'cultural turn' in feminist theory through the 1990s echoes Yiftachel's criticism of British geographers' intense interest in

culture and discourse. This is that labour and the hard facts of material existence receded from view: '[t]he body that eats, that works, that dies, that is afraid – that body just isn't there' (Bynum 1995: 1). The labouring body and the economy are irrepressible when considering domestic workers' lives. As a consequence, a case study of domestic workers provides an opportunity to better assess what strands of poststructural theory, including discourse analysis, can bring to materialist analysis.

Figure 1.1 Interpreting domestic workers' experiences in the shadow of Flor Contemplación: a Vancouver protest against the execution of Flor Contemplación in 1995. Photograph courtesy of the Philippine Women Centre.

Second, facing the embodied pain of forced migration has allowed me to better understand the geography of the case study, which is transnational rather than national in scope. It is a case study that forces feminist theory into a dialogue with those who originate outside of 'the West'. I first conceived this study within a multicultural problematic of exploring

differences among women in Canada. It took me a remarkably long time to understand – really understand – that a study of migrant workers is a study of the processes that create global inequality (see Figure 1.1), and, in the case of Filipino migrant workers, a study of the ongoing repercussions of American neo-colonialism. This difficulty of focusing on US neo-colonialism in the Philippines is in fact widespread and a matter of some debate. Writing within the US context, San Juan (2000) argues that the marginal status of Philippines studies within area studies in the United States is bound up with a remarkable and dogged failure on the part of US citizens to critique their nation's imperialist strategy. He also argues that it is actually in inverse relation to the Philippines' historical geopolitical significance to the United States: 'it was in the Philippines that crucial US imperial policy initiatives, as well as the entrepreneurial ethos of its relations with Asia, were first tried out and instituted' (5). What evolved was a model of 'collaborative empire', which required an 'elaborate ideological and cultural platform, with their requisite state apparatuses of surveillance, coercion, and carceral quarantine' (5). The migration of Filipina domestic workers to Canada today is an outgrowth of this platform – conditions of economic underdevelopment and national debt propel domestic workers from the Philippines, and competency in English, which reflects the Americanisation of their educational system, enables their entry into Canada. It is not just that Filipinos bring American processes of empire into view. The Philippines is a nation for which nationhood has been both facilitated by, and blocked and deferred through, a long history of colonial conquest. This intertwined history of nation-building and colonial conquest is a persistent reminder of the interconnectedness of the world. This is not a world of fused and fluid hybridity (which I critique in Chapter 6), but one of specific political, economic and cultural articulation, of nations and individuals articulating their 'nationhood' and identities in relation to each other.

San Juan's description of a US model of collaborative empire already suggests how imperialism works on individual subjectivities and bodies. The rich opportunity for thinking through scale is a third factor that makes the case study of Filipina domestic workers such a useful theoretical resource. One of the fascinating spatial contradictions lived by Filipina domestic workers is the juxtaposition of long-range migration(s) and daily experiences of spatial constraint. To some extent confined in employers' homes by long days of labour, in which they may feel comfortable only in parts and only at certain times of day, they also seek to control a kind of

leakiness and invasion of their bodily boundaries within that space. Domestic workers' efforts to define and cross boundaries at a number of scales is an issue to which I will attend, and the contradiction between spatial mobility and cramped existences at a variety of scales makes this a provocative case study with which to explore the prospects of spatialising feminist theory.

Figure 1.2 Collaborating with the Philippine Women Centre in 1995. Photograph courtesy of the Philippine Women Centre.

Fourth, possibly the most significant factor that has forced theory into a working relationship with the case study is the manner in which the latter was accomplished. The heart of the case study has involved collaboration with the Philippine Women Centre (PWC) in Vancouver from 1995 on, in what some call participatory action research (see Figure 1.2). In Chapter 8, I consider in more detail the practicalities, ambiguities and dilemmas of such collaboration. At its most basic, this sustained collaboration has forced a responsibility to theorise in concrete ways. Working with any community group would have this effect, but the responsibility

is doubly present when working with a Filipino one. The struggle not to be generalised is ever present. Filipino activists in Vancouver struggle for their specificity against the efforts of Canadian bureaucrats to enfold and administer their experiences in Canada within a multicultural framework. In the US context, Filipino activists have also resisted becoming submerged within an Asian-American identity (Bonus 2000; San Juan 2000). This insistence on specificity is no doubt tied to ongoing commitments to social and political transformation in the Philippines, and continuing resistance to US neo-colonial ventures there. To merge Filipino experience within a multicultural or pan-Asian perspective obscures the long history of Filipino revolutionary struggle for national autonomy. Working with Filipino activists' groups is to be continuously reminded of the limits to generalisation, and the value and necessity of theorising within the everyday rather than viewing the empirical merely as an illustration of or a vehicle for abstract theorising. Theorising concretely both exposes the limits to the particular theory being used and requires the creative re-articulation of critical concepts. Putting feminist theory to work on Filipino struggles in Vancouver has allowed me to rethink the thorny issue of agency in relation to Foucauldian – and by extension Judith Butler's – discourse analysis (Chapter 3), gain a different perspective on the limits and potentials of human and citizenship rights (Chapter 5), reconsider multiculturalism (Chapters 6 and 7), and think about the conservative limits of my epistemological framework (Chapter 8).

I would be trivialising the challenges of moving between the abstractions of academic debate and political strategising if I did not admit that there have been both high and low moments in this translation process. The first paper on which the PWC and I collaborated involved thinking through theories of 'the body' in relation to the testimony of domestic workers (Pratt in collaboration with PWC; 1998). I had a niggling fear that my collaborators had been polite rather than genuinely enthusiastic about the enframing theory, and was thus relieved when a colleague reported being teased in a friendly way at a PWC social gathering by the director's husband, who asked whether she was another academic who wrote about the body. I took this as evidence that poststructuralist theory could, after all, speak to Marxist-inclined activists. I even reported it as such (Katz 1998). Engaged in another project in summer 2002, one of the original research collaborators confessed that the theoretical discussion on the body in the earlier paper had no meaning for her; it was irrelevant to her experience and struggles in Vancouver. It is important

for academics to have this kind of disappointment, and to be reminded both of the difficulty of bringing feminist theory to practical matters and the importance of doing so. I am under no illusions; this book is one step in such a process of translation. It is a series of dialogues between highly abstracted theoretical and less abstracted empirical analyses. Ideally, it is also a means to other dialogues outside the text.

Working with an activist group has a further salutary effect on feminist theorising. It brings with it a tremendous optimism and energy for social transformation. Feminists have been persistent critics of overly abstracted theory, including new variants that arose through the 1990s. Feminist critiques of theorisations of transnationalism, postnationalism, multiculturalism,[4] globalisation,[5] and Empire[6] typically turn on the need to specify these processes in particular places, and to acknowledge the indeterminacy of their effects. Nonetheless, Meaghan Morris remarks on the tendency within feminism 'to know in advance that any event is just more of the same old story, more of the *same* patriarchy, the *same* racism, the *same* form of class exploitation', and she notes that this unwillingness to register nuance and change 'too easily becomes that old familiar feeling that nothing ever can change' (1998: 199; original emphasis). The ethical, utopian, political impulse of feminism is the belief that things – the systemic production of social difference – can and must be changed. Feminist theory is a limited resource if it lacks the subtlety not only to diagnose the specificity of this production, but the vitality to animate social change. Theorising within the concrete in the good company of those who have committed their daily life to social change returns some of this vitality.

The book is organised by two objectives: of working on feminist theory as a geographer and putting feminist theory to work on a concrete struggle. The structure of the book formalises the dialogue between theory and practice, but the links between theory and the empirical are thought about differently in different chapters. Chapters 2 and 4 consider what spatial readings bring to debates in feminist theory on theorising subjectivity and universal norms. These are interleaved with chapters that examine the relevance of these theoretical debates for understanding the long-term ghettoisation of Filipino domestic workers in the Canadian labour market, and domestic workers' organisations' use of human-rights discourse. The empirical chapters are not simple demonstrations or illustrations of theory. Chapter 3 shows how occupational ghettoisation is understandable within discourse analysis, but also how imagining discourse

in the concrete allows fresh opportunities for conceiving agency. In Chapter 5, I argue that it is impossible to think through adequately the possibility of rights discourse in the abstract. Chapter 6 problematises the theory/empirical divide more completely by considering how empirical objects are in part produced through theory, and how flawed theories can be used in other empirical contexts in fresh ways. In particular, the empirical object of transnational migrant produced within theories of transnationalism, though flawed, can be re-used to rethink the potentials of multiculturalism. Both empirical objects and theories are treated instrumentally, as imperfect objects with which to think concretely, to imagine alternative pasts, futures and modes of attachment and settlement. The theme of re-imagining multiculturalism within a transnational frame is pursued through a fuller range of feminist theory in the chapter that follows. The final chapter considers how epistemological conventions constitute empirical evidence, and it is my collaboration with Filipino grass roots activists that allows me to see this. I attempt to think through some of the personal and political difficulties of a white, middle-class, Western academic collaborating with Filipino migrants, as well as the productive challenges that such collaboration poses to academic scholarship. Recognising the limits imposed by academic convention enables me to think about producing other kinds of empirical objects, through role playing for instance, that encourage flights of fantasy and are attuned not simply to documenting existing patterns of exploitation and social inequality, but to transforming them.

Notes

1. For introductions to feminist geography, see IBG's Study Group in Gender (1997); Domosh and Seager (2001); McDowell (1999); Pratt (2000a); Rose (1993).
2. Massey (1997) outlines the tendency to attribute all of the processual action to history and to conceive of space as a static container. She calls attention to the creative effects of 'spatial disruptions', chance encounters between people, narratives and material histories and advises that, rather than claiming too much for either time or space, it is more useful to conceive of space-time. See also May and Thrift (2001).
3. Unfortunately, there are many such examples to draw upon: for example Nagar (2002); Raju (2002).
4. Some of these feminist critiques are reviewed in Chapter 7. See also Grewal and Kaplan (1994); Mitchell (1997a); Pratt and Yeoh (2003).
5. The discursive framing of globalisation actively discourages this attention to specificity. It is a discourse, as the authors known as Gibson-Graham (1996) have argued, that is badly in need of rescripting in order to open possibilities for agency and

organised political opposition. In standard narratives of globalisation, capitalism is masculinised, globalisation is read through a metaphor of penetration and rape, and workers absorb the politics of fear in ways analogous to rape victims. Following Sharon Marcus' rescripting of rape, Gibson-Graham considers ways of rhetorically diminishing the perceived power of multinational corporations by exploring their vulnerabilities. They rewrite the male body to see how this might reshape our understanding of capitalism and globalisation. They envision seminal fluid as leaky, often misdirected and wasted, and – violating the norms of heterosexuality – they imagine the male body as penetrable. By analogy, they want us to consider that money (as capitalism's semen) might also misfire, and that non-capitalist enterprises have the capacity to penetrate capitalism. 'Queering' globalisation in this way, they claim, liberates alternative scripts, which enable the expansion of non-capitalist economic and social forms. For addition feminist critiques of the globalisation literature, see Fernandez-Kelly and Wolf (2001); C. Freeman (2001).

6. See Lisa Rafael's (2001) critique of Hardt and Negri's (2000) *Empire*.

CHAPTER 2

Spatialising the Subject of Feminism

In 1999 Martha Nussbaum published in *The New Republic* a remarkable polemic against the influences of French poststructuralist theory on academic feminists in the United States. She charged American academic feminists with an almost total disregard for the struggles of women outside of their own country and 'the virtually complete turning from the material side of life, toward a type of verbal and symbolic politics that makes the flimsiest of connections with the real situation of real women' (38). 'These developments', she ventured, 'owe much to the recent prominence of French postmodernist thought . . . Many have . . . derived from the writings of Michel Foucault (rightly or wrongly) the fatalistic idea that we are prisoners of an all-enveloping structure of power, and that real-life reform movements usually end up serving power in new and insidious ways' (j8). It invites a 'quietism' that 'collaborates with evil' (45). Nussbaum comes to some of her conclusions through her attempts to work with the theory: 'Try teaching Foucault at a contemporary law school, as I have' (42).

In this chapter, I take up Nussbaum's challenge to develop the implications of Foucault's thinking for feminism. I trace some of the different ways that feminists have redeployed Foucault's analysis of the discursive construction of subjectivity and the workings of power in modern societies to pursue their own questions about gender norms.

If there is some truth to Nussbaum's claims about US academic feminism, it may result from the fact that some feminists have not taken from Foucault as fully as they might. Foucault was an astute observer of the spatiality of social life and geographers take great pleasure in his admission that: 'Geography must indeed necessarily lie at the heart of my concerns' (1980a: 77). This geographical imagination is muted in some of the most significant feminist extensions of Foucault's theorising, notably in the writing of Martha Nussbaum's main target: Judith Butler. I will argue that a fuller geographical account returns some of the materiality for which Nussbaum yearns. At the same time, at another geographical scale, feminists such as Gayatri Spivak and Ann Stoler have developed analyses

of the geographical particularity of Foucauldian theory. Their insistence that Foucault's analysis be framed within histories of imperialism and colonial encounter has forced a renewed engagement with political economy and worlds outside the borders of the West.

By working with rather than against Foucault, I intend to arrive at Nussbaum's destination: a cosmopolitan materialist feminism, by which I roughly mean a feminism that engages 'real situations', life beyond texts, and worlds beyond 'the West'. In doing so, we can retain Foucault's profound insights into the workings of power and knowledge, ones that force a continual questioning of feminist complicities in structures of domination. Unlike Nussbaum, I view this as an enabling rather than a 'fatalistic' outcome.

Foucault and Discourses of Sexuality

For many feminists, the most influential of Foucault's books has been the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. It is within this book that Foucault clearly articulates his theory of biopower, and traces the centrality of sexuality to the circulation of modern power. Foucault traces a remarkable proliferation of discourses about sexuality within European societies, from the seventeenth century on. There was an 'institutional incitement to speak about it [in public], and to do so more and more' (1978: 18), first by the Catholic Church, then by the state and educational, medical and psychiatric institutions. These discourses multiplied because sexuality became 'an especially dense transfer point for relations of power . . . useful for the greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies' (103). In particular, discourses of sexuality produced four' objects of knowledge that were also targets and anchorage points of the ventures of knowledge' (105): the 'hysterical woman', the Malthusian couple, the masturbating child of the bourgeois family, and the adult pervert. Foucault argues that women's bodies became saturated in sexuality, pathologised in medical discourse and regulated through state discourses on fertility and population control; children's sexuality was more closely monitored at home and in school; homosexuality was pathologised and criminalised. What emerged was biopower, a merging of two forms of power 'over life': the disciplining of individual bodies (to optimise their capacities, usefulness and docility) and the regulation of the population or 'species body'.

Foucault's analysis of biopower has been extremely influential, in particular, the understanding that the subject is constituted through

discourse. Discourses of sexuality literally brought new subjects into being. Homosexuality, for instance, was transformed from a sexual practice to a defining identity: 'it was implanted in bodies' and given 'an analytical, visible and permanent reality' (44). More generally, the multiple pleasures of the body were knit together in a fictitious unity, that of sex. But instead of being recognised as an effect of discourse, sex was given definitional, causal power: agency. Sex became the key to subjectivity and the major secret to be uncovered (through the confessional or psychoanalysis, for example). 'In the space of a few centuries, a certain inclination has led us to direct the question of what we are, to sex' (1978: 78).

Giving agency to sexuality veils and perpetuates the workings of power. We understand our sexuality to be repressed and yearn for liberation from this repression for authentic self-expression. Foucault urges us to rid ourselves of this popular juridico-discursive representation of power. This is power that is negative (prohibitive) and acts by laying down rules (legislative). We tend to hold on to this representation of power, he argues, because it allows us to persist in our belief in a domain of freedom outside of power, in the idea that we are autonomous subjects' subjected' to power. He also argues that this language of power developed historically to establish the legitimacy of the nation-state. Bourgeois nation-state institutions, in opposition to feudal ones, represented themselves as agencies of regulation that function in universal ways on the basis of principles of rights and justice.

Law, Foucault argued, is not the central mechanism of modern power. Modern methods of power operate through normalisation, not law; technique rather than right; control rather than punishment; and throughout society rather than through the state alone. It is not that the state is no longer an important locus of power but that it draws upon independent disciplines of knowledge, and these knowledges inhabit bodies in ways that exceed state control. Power is not a thing held by institutions or individuals; it is relational, exercised 'in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations' (94). 'The condition of possibility of power, at least of the point of view that allows its exercise to be made intelligible . . . is *the moving base* of force relations that, by their inequality, incessantly *induce* states of power' (quoted and translated by Spivak 1993: 31; Spivak's emphasis). Strategies of power operate in relation to and are made visible by techniques of knowledge: 'we will start, therefore, from . . . "local centers" of power-knowledge' (Foucault 1978: 98). There is an incessant 'back and forth movement' between schemes of knowledge

and subjugation. Psychiatric classifications of homosexuals as deviant, for example, became one mechanism for subjugation.

Spivak directs our attention to the 'can-do'ness of the word *pouvoir* (usually translated as 'power'). 'If power/knowledge is seen as the only translation of *'pouvoir/savoir'*, it monumentalizes Foucault unnecessarily' (1993:34). She argues that if we get a 'homely verbiness' into *pouvoir* we 'might come up with something like this: if the lines of making sense of something are laid down in a certain way, then you are able to do only those things with that something which are possible within and by arrangement of those lines' (34). We are able to do something only as we are able to make sense of it. Discourses – the power/knowledge – of sexuality are the lines through which we make sense of ourselves and others. What Spivak calls the 'homely tactics of everyday *pouvoir/savoir*' also set the terms for resistance. Foucault was sceptical about calls for sexual liberation because they operate so completely within the discourse of sexuality. To seek liberation through sex is to persist in attributing agency to it.

Foucault persistently redirects inquiry away from the interests and over-all domination served by discourses of sexuality, towards analyses of linkages, supports and the effects of power, arguing that there is no one stable form of subjugation. It is for this reason that he frames his analysis as antagonistic to Marxism; he refuses the argument that discourses of sexuality developed first of all or primarily as a means of labour control and served only to dominate. He ventures that the techniques of sexuality were first deployed among the bourgeoisie as an affirmation of self. Why? They supported a new political ordering of life insofar as they supported bourgeois status claims. Whereas aristocrats claimed status through the purity of their bloodline, the bourgeoisie could claim it through their genetic integrity, their strength, vigour and health (which required the intense monitoring of women's bodies – in particular their fertility). Only towards the end of the eighteenth century were these tactics and techniques extended to the working classes as a means of subjugation and control. But what eventually became a strategy of class formation and regulation emerged historically from a disparate set of local power relations, situated in the confessional, the school, the psychiatric hospital, the family, among other institutions. 'We will start, therefore', writes Foucault, 'from what might be called "local centers" of power-knowledge . . . [though] no "local center", no "pattern of transformation" could function if, through a series of sequences, it did not eventually enter into an over-all strategy' (1978:98-9). 'One must conceive of the double conditioning of a strategy

by the specificity of possible [local] tactics, and of tactics by the strategic envelope that makes them work' (1978: 100).[1]

Feminists might note that the strategic envelope that Foucault eventually delineates involves a rather singular class analysis. He argued that discourses of sexuality supported and relayed bourgeois status claims, and then functioned to regulate the working classes. Foucault demonstrated little interest in how the hysterisation of bourgeois women, for instance, was so easily accomplished. Feminists have wondered: is power as diffused as Foucault suggests? And is not gender domination another over-all strategy worthy of commentary? These are not questions that would have interested Foucault. His 'ostensible problem with feminism' (Butler 1990: 95) emerged from his refusal to take sexual difference as a starting point of analysis and his insistence that sexual difference, and sex more generally, are social constructions, effects of discourse rather than agents of social change or personal transformation. A feminism that valorises 'womanly' qualities and holds as its ideal the liberation of women from discriminatory social practices echoes the fantasies of sexual liberationists. It rests on a juridical representation of power that reads contemporary social practices, codes and norms as purely restrictive. A Foucauldian would reverse the analysis and ask: what and how do social practices and conventions produce sexual difference and gender in this form? This is precisely what Judith Butler has done.

Butler and the Discursive Construction of Sex/Gender

Judith Butler unsettles the assumption that gender is a social construction built on the foundations of biological difference: sex. Ironically, then, she identifies the way that conventional social constructivism is partially foundational insofar as biological sex differentiation is assumed. It is the production of binarised and hierarchised gendered meanings that is typically of concern in feminist analyses. Butler cites (1990), however, the small but not insignificant number of babies born with indeterminate sex characteristics and the societal impossibility of leaving them in a space between the binaries of male and female. The compulsory norms of heterosexuality – heteronormativity – dictate two sexes. In a move that reverses the standard feminist account of the relations between gender and sex, Butler argued that gender norms dictate two sexes and not vice versa. This is different from a conventional feminist social constructivist position insofar as she is arguing that biological sex itself is produced and it is not just gender that is socially constructed. Gender,

including the category woman, thus loses its interiorised, biological foundation (that is to say, sex). Butler reconceptualises gender as performative. We come to understand our identity as girl/woman or boy/man because we repeatedly perform it: 'There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (Butler 1990: 25).

These performances are not arbitrarily chosen. They are compelled and sanctioned by heteronormativity, the compulsory norms of heterosexuality. Butler's re-examination of the story of Herculine Barbin makes this point abundantly clear. Herculine was a nineteenth-century hermaphrodite, famously discussed by Foucault (1980b), whose sexual ambiguity was discovered and disallowed by the medical profession, the church and the state. S/he was forced to assume an unambiguously male body and identity, and her/his life ended in bitterness and suicide. Herculine could not embody norms of heterosexuality predicated on the paternal law of kinship,

> [B]ecause s/he cannot provide the occasion by which that law naturalizes itself in the symbolic structures of anatomy. In other words, the law is not simply a cultural imposition on an otherwise natural 'heterogeneity'; the law requires conformity to its own notions of 'nature' and gains its legitimacy through the binary and asymmetrical naturalization of bodies. (Butler 1990: 106)

Gender norms are materialised by the body. One can read from Butler's analysis of Herculine that the body is not just 'invested' with gender norms but is 'in some sense animated by the norm, or contoured by a norm' (Butler 1996: 111). Gender norms are materialised by the body. So, for example, parents of babies born with indeterminate sex characteristics are almost immediately asked to determine a sex so that the ambiguity of their baby's body is removed. The impossibility of Herculine's life was that s/he could not embody that nature. Butler thus attempts to occupy the conceptual space between biological determinism and constructionism because she is arguing that, although gender norms act on the materiality of the body to produce sexed bodies, sex differentiation is not automatically 'there' before gender. 'There is a tendency', she writes,

> [T]o think that sexuality is either constructed or determined; to think that if it is constructed, it is in some sense free, and if it is determined,

> it is in some sense fixed. These opposites do not describe the complexity of what is at stake in any effort to take account of the conditions under which sex and sexuality are assumed. (Butler 1993: 94)

In an effort to describe this complexity, Butler welds Foucauldian to psychoanalytic theory. In Butler's view, Foucault's theory of the subject undertheorises the 'instabilities of identificatory practices' (Butler 2000b: 151). She takes from Lacan the idea that the psychical image of the body plays a fundamental role in the constitution of the subject and is the means through which we apprehend our body. The body image defines the boundaries of what Butler calls the bodily ego by uniting disconnected sensations that do not yet make up a body. Bodies constructed within hegemonic, heterosexual culture are bounded within the terms of heterosexual exchange, so as to close down certain sexual practices. Thus we understand certain organs and bodily surfaces as sexual, and there are normalised boundaries and acceptable points of penetrability and contact. Butler understands the instability and hence the incessant policing of the boundary of the body through the psychoanalytic concepts of repression and abjection. In order to achieve a hegemonic gender identity we must reject some of our sexual attachments (that is to say, non-heterosexual ones). What we expel becomes alien, defiled, or abject, and we develop a strong sense of boundaries in order to stabilise a self purified of its disruptive, abjected elements. The loss of these abjected attachments can be neither avowed nor grieved by heterosexuals in a heteronormative society: homosexuality' produces a domain of unliveable passion and ungrievable loss' (Butler 1997: 135). Butler takes from psychoanalysis the understanding that the unconscious sets limits on what we can perform: 'What is exteriorized or performed can only be understood by reference to what is barred from performance, what cannot or will not be performed' (1997: 144-5). While this is hardly a model of conscious agency – quite the opposite – it provides one way of understanding slippage across performances, the passion with which many of us cling to gender roles and the virulence of homophobia. The troubled melancholic heterosexual psyche that she describes also provides an important rationale for subverting the tyranny of gender roles. Because heterosexuals cannot consciously grieve the loss, homosexual desire is never resolved and thus continues to 'panic gender' (136); hence the incessant, insistent performance of a gender ideal that can never be stabilised or finally achieved. Of course Butler recognises the existence of openly gay identifications

and a range of queer politics, and there has been much controversy around her discussion of drag performance as a subversion of heteronormativity. I draw attention to her analysis of heterosexual melancholy because it subverts the conventional psychiatrisation of 'the homosexual' by returning a troubled psyche to heterosexuals.

Despite the psychological complexity of Butler's theory of the subject, it has many critics. I want to engage with four of their criticisms by reading them geographically. The criticisms are: that Butler theorises a fully determined subject; is only concerned with a purely discursive, non-material world; provides an individualistic theory; and, finally, is US-centred in unacknowledged ways. Several geographers have rightly expressed dissatisfaction with the abbreviated spatiality of Butler's theory and I want to argue that by building this spatiality into Butler's theory, these four criticisms can be at least partially addressed. In Thrift and Dewsbury's (2000: 414) assessment: 'Butler makes little room for space. Period.' Nelson's position is that Butler's attenuated reading of agency actively prevents geographical analyses: 'The kinds of questions many geographers ask cannot be adequately addressed by a strictly performative understanding of identity, an approach that assumes an already abstracted time and placeless subject' (1999: 351). Rather than abandon Butler, I want to consider what a geographical imagination brings to her theory.

Reading Butler as a Spatial Theorist

The critique concerning agency is one that Butler shares with Foucault. Addressing Butler in particular, Benhabib asks,

> If we are no more than the sum total of the gendered expressions we perform, is there ever any chance to stop the performance for a while, to pull the curtain down, and let it rise only if one can have a say in the production of the play itself? (1995: 21)

That is, are we fully determined by discourse, and what role can we play in producing different ones? There are a number of ways of responding to these questions (for example, Smith 1988). One is to argue that discourses have many meanings, producing diverse effects, some unintended by their users. Discourses produce subject positions that not only regulate but are the medium for power relations. Discourses of sexuality may have created the stigmatised, marginalising identity of homosexual, for example, but

the identity of homosexual has been taken up in radicalised ways to decriminalise homosexuality, and alter the meaning and practice of marriage.[2] In other words, a stigmatising identity that disciplined and criminalised can be redeployed in liberating ways. Feminism itself is a politics of resistance and social transformation that emerges out of a regulatory discourse of sexuality. Further, Butler's theory of performativity is based on the understanding that, although we have no capacity to stand outside discursive conventions, we do have the 'possibility of reworking the very conventions by which we are enabled' (Butler 1995: 136). There are possibilities of subverting norms through each performance. Individuals are also produced by multiple, sometimes contradictory, discourses. Managing these contradictions, or bringing one discourse into relation with another, can open points of resistance. Lisa Lowe argues, for example, that the liberal principles of American democracy are at odds with the various ways that Asian-American citizens enter discourse: as 'the model minority' or 'the invading multitude, the lascivious seductress, the servile yet treacherous domestic, the automaton whose inhuman efficiency will supercede American ingenuity' (1996a: 18). Placing a discourse of egalitarian liberal democracy in tension with discourses that stereotype and differentiate creates a possibility for criticising constructions of the American nation and an economic system 'that profits from racism' (1996a: 26).

These are essentially aspatial ways of thinking about the agency of a discursively produced subject, and they can be enhanced through a geographical imagination. Butler intimates this when she recognises that the capacity for agency is not a static property of human beings secured through theoretical debate but, rather, is contingent upon and bound up with historical conditions. For Butler, the pressing question is specific and concrete rather than metaphysical: her question is, 'what are the conditions under which agency becomes possible?' (Butler 1995: 136). Butler does not develop this idea but one way of doing so is to consider that discourses emerge as situated practices in particular places; they are inherently geographical (Pred 1992). There are *socio-spatial circuits* through which cultural and personal narratives are circulated, legitimated, and given meaning. Contradictions within and across discourses come to light through the day-to-day practice of living within and moving through them. If we understand discourses as situated practices produced in particular places, we can also understand agency and critique in more embodied ways. Moving through places may involve moving between discursive formations and be one way that individuals become aware of the contradictions between discourses. Travel from a working-class neighbour