

Terminator Three: The Revenge of the Subject

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The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return of terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is: Let us wage a war on totality; let us witness to the unrepresentable, let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name.

Jean Francois Lyotard

"Feminist" studies in present academic circles has become undefinable by many of its own practitioners. Feminism is no longer able to lay claim to being a unified entity or monad that can articulate or describe, in totality, the academic and political standpoint of any one group. This loss of an unified telos and the language by which it has been expressed has largely signalled both a loss of community and a consensus of struggle for many second wave feminists. At this particular conjuncture in the her-story of feminism we are led to question the reasons for this dispersal or non-unity (or

question what this unity has meant) and how this aporia has affected feminist theorizing. Part of questioning the unity or consensus of a past feminism is also to question the nature of truth or falsity of this consensus. In attempting to locate this problematic, we are led to interrogate the meaning of the construction of "woman": the subject of feminist theory. The task of re-conceptualising the subject of woman in feminist theory is not simply to figure a de-centred subject, but rather to deterritorialize subjectivity. In other words, the feminist project is not one of de-centring subjectivity, but one of provisionally terminating subjectivity altogether as a means by which to achieve the project of equity, and not just that of equivalence.

Ontologically and historically, second wave feminism has built a tradition of thought about the notion of woman that is based on naturalistic and universalist assumptions. However, feminists of this generation who rely on a naturalistic and "feminized" (la nature) biologic ontology of woman are in themselves appealing to an empirical epistemology derived from a malecentric notion of nature. As such, in the history of feminist theory, the "subject" has been primarily and continually presented as an unproblematized static entity, which belies the fact that the very core of feminism (i.e. the concept(s) of gender) needs to be "unpacked" and dismantled through a project of feminist theory -- a project which leads to a problematized epistemological and ontological framing of the subject "woman". Until this project of deterritorializing subjectivity can be achieved a politics of difference cannot be constructively used in feminist theory. Alternatively, one may also skeptically ask: is this questioning and/or acceptance of difference merely a descriptive form or is it a prescription to move to a radical understanding of the subject? There are no easy answers to such inwardly posed questions, but certainly one can only know the answers to these questions by first asking them, and then by acting upon/through the problems of subjectivity raised. By examining the texts of Lynn Segal, Linda Alcoff, and Shane Phelan, the difficulty of initiating a discussion of multiplicity and what a terminated

and/or problematized "subjectivity" means to feminist theory will be raised.

Questions regarding the "formation of the subject" are implicitly based on a notion of the white subject. The white subject is the centre from which all representation is made, existing in the imagination of the possessor of power and in the dispossessed alike. Therefore, any re-writing or re-configuration of the white subject is posited either in relation or in opposition to it-self. Through the unwitting (re)construction of its "other", the white "it" is centre/ the margin its other.

Here, then, we begin to see what is at stake in [the] so-called dispersal of the subject. For what is this subject that, threatened by loss, is so bemoaned? For some, this may indeed be a great loss, a loss which leads to narcissistic laments and hysterical disavowals of the end of art, of culture, of the west. But for others, precisely for Others, it is no great loss at all (Foster, 1985: 202).

The "other" which Hal Foster has defined in the above statement is as much a product of the political and cultural discourse of the times as the object of this discourse. In Foster's critical comments, typical of cultural studies discourse, the "other" is not only being re-created, but more importantly, it is still maintained. Foster is saying that for "others" the margins are able to gain voice through this disruption of the white subject. However, what is being re-produced through this statement is the occurrence of "other" even though Foster is discursively hinting at the discussion of the emancipation of the "other". In other words, as long as there is "other" we still have the dichotomy of old which purportedly is being vanquished. And this dichotomous process of re-presenting the "other" has a severe impact on the way in which an understanding of multiplicity is disseminated.

First, we have Foster's discussion of the lamentation of the loss of western culture, which he signifies as imperialist and oppressive. This loss however, is disguised and falsified

by his second comment in which it is implied that the empowered are somehow becoming disempowered because of the loss of the centred subject. Secondly, as an academic, Foster unwittingly speaks with the privilege of objective academic knowledge about the emancipation of the "other" as though this can be (un)done through a dissipating (although un-named) subject. The othering process, or the us/them dichotomy, is demonstrated in his statement which also shows how this process is (re)produced systemically through binary structures of thought. Therefore, due to the boundaries of a dualistic discourse that have remained deeply entrenched in language and action, the discourse of difference is contained in the very system it set out to deterritorialize. The system will remain intact as long as we, as interrogators/terminators, remain unwilling to move away from a naturalised dichotomous thought process to one of multiplicity. The white subject has been historically neutralised and naturalised in a western feminist consciousness and it is this problematic that I believe is central to a discussion of the politics of multiple feminisms as it is located in a western feminist discourse. The colour blindness of western feminism as a concept/practice has been brought to task by both black feminists and people involved in anti-imperialist struggles. However, this centred subject remains a priori to the majority of western feminist theory. In this sense, a politics of difference or a "hegemonic" coalition of the forces cannot be achieved until this knot is undone. As long as we must talk about or name race/ class/ sexuality we will be caught in a continuous spiral of identity practices and games whose reach extends back to a nostalgic past when the "gang was just the gang" (or the girls were girls and the men were men). Perhaps alternatives may be explored, as the possibility of an excursion of multiple layers/ surfaces/ levels and plateaus takes place or potentializes. Or, that is, the multiple surface is simply one idea or notion of such multiplicity.

This excursion raises some of my concerns with what is becoming known as "the politics of difference" and its impact on feminist theorizing. What feminism or feminisms has come to designate, as stated by Teresa de Lauretis is :

a process of understanding that is premised on historical specificity and on the simultaneous, if often contradictory, presence of those differences in each of its instances and practices... (de Lauretis, 1990: 116).

However, in discussing the notion of multiplicity, the idea of difference or marginalia is often both ambivalently and obliviously addressed by feminists (adherents to the white subject). It is exactly this unwillingness on the part of feminist theorists to attempt to subvert a dichotomous thought process that has led to an inability to conceive of what the possibilities of multiplicity may mean. An aspect of this ambivalence in feminist theory is produced by the rupture of the naturalised notion of the subject "woman", and thus, secondarily bringing about the seeming impossibility of consensus among feminists. It is an underlying current in feminist theory and/or the practice of feminism (as we will take note in the texts we will analyze) to search for a consensus or a community, and yet the moment of contradiction occurs when the project of consensus building takes place while the integrative feminist project simultaneously attempts to move towards a recognition of difference. Thus, feminists are, at the same time, caught between two projects: one in which the subject, the modern white subject, remains centred; and the other, in which "the other" is cast into a politic of difference which remains contained in a modernist paradigm. In situations such as these the possible project of difference or a politic(s) of multiplicity becomes disabled since the overriding signification of a central white subject remains absolute.

Thinking in terms of multiplicity rather than in terms of dichotomy offers the interrogator/terminator a way to understand an eclectic assemblage of positions, identities, creativities, and forces by which to view the social construction of reality as a dispersed or ever-dispersing activity. However, a politic of multiplicity is not easily defined nor is a discussion of multiplicity easily entered into or centred in any

given discussion (it is the nature of the beast). And when speaking about multiple feminisms, (that "there are as many feminists as feminisms") we are confronted with the problem foundational to thinking multiply. In one sense, the discussion of multiple feminisms has simply come to define the existence and so called acceptance of multiple identities, for example, black feminism, lesbian feminism, socialist feminism, or cultural feminism. However, in order to engage with what these identities mean in relation to a feminist politic, we must engage with a notion of multiplicity at a different level.

It is at the ontological level or level of desire that we as terminators have our most difficult task. We must examine the foundational premises upon which feminism has been built in order to evaluate what the so-called acceptance of multiple identities actually implies. Mainly we are faced with a history of feminist thought that was founded on the dichotomy of us/them, male/female - a foundation which is also firmly entrenched in the sex/gender dichotomy. And, as such, it is difficult to speak of multiplicities while being forced to think in linear dichotomous modes of thought, as taught by conventions (like feminist theory) of the academy. By speaking of multiplicity we are, in fact, reading our-many-selves against the grain, and what is possible is a dialogue that intersects positions on a variety of surfaces, layers and powers; attending at once to the particular but also to the ecumenical. When discussing the three designated articles that have been chosen to address the question of difference or multiple feminism(s) multiplicity must be defined on several levels. Lynn Segal's *Is the Future Female?* provides a context in which the different levels and plateaus of developing multiple feminism(s) has appeared. Segal begins her discussion of the British feminist movement from the sixties to the eighties with a critical evaluation of some of the theoretical feminist interventions which marked this movement's subsequent dispersal. Central to her analysis is the question of what feminists should fight for, or in other words, how to attain power. In positing this question, however, Segal's analysis of power is both uncritical and undefined. For this reason it is important to question what

she means by power. Segal states:

We did want real power, in every sphere. By power we meant not the means to control and dominate others - at least that is not what most of us thought we wanted - but rather the freedom and the space to express our own desires, creativity and the potential to flourish and to find our own place in the sun (Segal, 1987: 81).

Segal does not reflexively examine the type of power which her (homogenous) "we" movement sought to attain, which is ultimately the power of the white subject. This unreflexive examination of the goals of the total movement, that of power, unwittingly supported the silencing and the disempowerment of "other" groups. The foundation which led to these perceptions, that of the unified movement, are undoubtedly based in the sex/gender system through which Segal and other socialist feminists conceived of the naturalised subject of woman. The woman that these feminists were concerned with was a unified totality, undifferentiated by sexuality, race and privileging. Even though socialist feminists consider the social construction of women's oppression, it is still a singular model of "woman" that is envisioned through their movement. The main problematic that we encounter in relation to Lynn Segal's work is the relationship between a community vis-à-vis the individual in a feminist struggle. Therefore, it is important for us to question whether the consensus which Segal nostalgically recalls in her analysis of the dispersed feminist movement is one of truth or falsity. The history of socialist feminism described by Segal is one which marks the rupture of a sense of community revolving around a common conception of the subject: woman. Her central and strongest critique of the feminism emerging in the 1980's was directed towards the cultural feminism of authors such as Dale Spender and Mary Daly. Segal states that:

...[cultural feminism] suggests purely idealist rather than any practical solutions to the universal reality of male domination. There is no talk of struggle, success, or even progress in Spender's work (ibid.: 58).

For Segal, Spender's work and that of cultural feminists is not only facile but unprofitable. She paints cultural feminism as a non-movement, based in a radical separatist view of the world that is, in turn, based in a biologic/spiritual sense of the world and the bodies of women (wombmen). Alternatively, Segal's interpretation of the "real" oppression of women is based in the sole determinants of social relations. She does not view women's oppression as manifested through language, nor as produced through a woman's body, but rather, attributes oppression to social structures and economics. Through the criticisms which Segal makes of the cultural feminists we witness the emergence of the rupture in the (seemingly) consolidated notion of the subject woman. However, Segal's position, in relation to the problematic biologism presented by the cultural feminists, does not lead to a more diverse or multiple understanding of the subject woman. Instead, Segal's position on the construction of woman is trapped by the dichotomy of sex/gender which prevents any re-analysis or re-presentation of woman. Such an entrapment provides several problems for an articulation of oppression based on sex/race/class lines. As well, this prevents the possibility of multiplicity or an understanding of the politics of difference because of her alternative definition of the subject woman. In other words, the model of "woman" is the centred white subject in Segal's work. And it is this *a priori* unified subject that deters the articulation of differences among women as much as does the essentialist representation of woman of the cultural feminists.

The issue at hand is the way in which Segal conceptualises difference and multiplicity while still holding on to a modern project that seeks out or laments coherency and attempts to solidify identity. In essence, she suggests that totality is an achievable goal.

Goodbye, for a while, to cynical indifference, to isolation, and the narrow social horizons which customarily confine us. Few things are more uplifting than the strengthening of identity, coherence and purpose which collective struggle and action can at times create. But that is in the early days, the days when victory or change seem possible: it is then that we feel we are consciously participating in the making of history (ibid.: 54).

Segal argues against a cultural feminist analysis of the creation of woman, as she supports a social constructivist model. However, in her critique and disappointment with the withering of her community, she remains steadfastly unreflexive in the issues surrounding race or sexuality. What is demonstrated through Segal's discussion of anti-imperialist struggles, struggles against racism, or struggles against homophobia, is that difference is only to be recognized as a hinderance to the possibility and desirability of a social totality; difference provides an obstacle to "true" emancipation. As Segal, raises the issue of feminism's subjectivity she obviates and circumvents the point she raises about a problematized coherent unity:

By this time socialist feminists were active in an even wider variety of political campaigns The range of these campaigns meant that it was often hard for socialist feminists to hold on to any clear sense of political identity and coherence either analytically or in practice (ibid.).

With her project of socialist feminism very much intact, she reinforces the importance of examining the social and economic structures of oppression as the site through which a transformative feminist politic can be achieved. Throughout the development of her argument she is unwilling to develop or re-examine the subject "woman" through a framing of multiple articulations and/or multiplicities of difference which leads her to cast aside anything that is "other", as woman with "special needs".

Throughout her work, Segal suggests that "the" feminist

movement and feminist theorizing have come to a moment of crisis, whereby she feels that feminist struggle and the transformative power of the feminist politic is in danger. That is, if "the" active agent in political movement is put into question, then can such a post-modern subject be (re) made into an active agent? And if such a remaking was possible, how would this agency be articulated in a theoretical project? With hopes of making clearer these grounds for agency, Segal suggests that there are two identifiable feminist projects in contemporary feminism: (1)... stresses basic differences between women and men, and asserts the moral and spiritual superiority of female experience, values, characteristics and culture: women's oppression in this view results from the suppression of this women-centred vision or separate female world. (2)... stresses the social and economic disadvantages of women and seeks to change and improve women's immediate circumstances, not just in the area of paid work and family life, but by providing funding for women's cultural projects, increasing women's safety in the streets, or meeting special needs of particular groups of women.

It is in this description that the construction of the "subject" is most explicitly stated. In this description of the contemporary feminist movement, women who are considered "others" or of "special needs" do not have power to act because, in Segal's analysis, these issues are marginal to the group effort. In this respect, the group effort or collective is based on the centred white subject and is non-differentiated. Thus, to counter Segal's reductive analysis which historicises a movement on such exclusionary terms, the concept of the subject that is constantly re-shifting and interrelating through multiple social relations must somehow be conceived. As terminators we are left to ask: how we might conceive of the multiplicities of feminism or of the lived social experience of life and what is at stake here?

Linda Alcoff's article, "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crises in Feminist Theory", is indicative of an attempt that seeks to "bridge the gap" between modernism, postmodernism, and feminism. Through this

process of discovering alternative routes in the game of identity constructions and representations, it is important to examine the articulation of what is both considered and rendered "post-modern" or "post-structuralist" theory in Alcoff's work. In this article, Alcoff examines feminist interventions into the question of the construction of "woman" between cultural feminists and post-structuralist feminists. She states that a common project between feminists today must be to re-evaluate the foundational terms of feminism:

(T)he dilemma facing feminist theorist today is that our very self-definition is grounded in a concept that we must deconstruct and de-essentialise in all of its aspects (Alcoff, 1988: 406).

Alcoff suggests that feminist academics have offered two major responses to this problem of the category of "woman". One of these responses, found in the cultural feminist movement, seeks to establish a positive nature to the characteristics attributed to femininity (e.g. passivity construed as peacefulness). In pursuing this project, cultural feminists have attempted to re-appropriate many of the characteristics that had once been regarded as negative and have sought to re-define the terms of "woman". However, this is a project still quite distinct from an actual re-conceptualisation of woman.

Alcoff's criticism of cultural feminism, much like Segal's, points to the restrictive and uni-dimensional re-definition of woman found in the project of cultural feminists. Both Segal and Alcoff see that the reliance on biologically construed values and attributes as an impediment to a feminist movement or struggle. Alcoff argues that cultural feminism does not critique the oppressive powers that have constructed woman, she seeks instead, an alternative route which undermines these structures of power through the construction of identity and representation. I would like to stress however, that alternatives which do not incorporate multiplicity do not allow for a way by which to evaluate multiple layers of oppression. In other words, while cultural

feminists (distinctively a white movement) advocate a single definition of "woman" they also, alternatively, offer an exclusionary vision of the world - something which is not a "true consensus" (although their project rests on the notion of a consensus or community of woman). It is at this conjuncture that one must proceed with caution as any other re-definition of woman may also fall victim to a process of exclusion. Thus, it is interesting that Alcoff situates her alternative route as one which gets beyond the problem of exclusion and uni-dimensional notions of identity and representation. She states:

[t]he problem with the cultural feminist response to sexism is that it does not criticize the fundamental mechanism of oppressive power used to perpetuate sexism and in fact reinvokes that mechanism in its supposed solution. The mechanism of power referred to here is the construction of the subject by a discourse that weaves knowledge and power into a coercive structure.... (ibid.: 415).

The second major response to the construction of "woman" in recent feminist theorizing, delineated by Alcoff, is post-structuralist. Alcoff suggests that a post-structuralist reading posits that any attempt at the re-definition of woman would necessarily lead back to an essentialized and stagnant unitary-subject. Ultimately this position, discussed by Alcoff, presumes that any definition of woman will inevitably lead to the exclusion of some. Alcoff summarizes the post-structuralist position this way:

Using French post-structuralist theory these feminists argue that such errors occur because we are in fundamental ways duplicating misogynist strategies when we try to define women, characterise women, or speak for women, even though allowing for a range of difference within the gender. The politics of gender or sexual difference must be replaced with a plurality of difference where gender loses its position of significance (ibid.: 15).

However, Alcoff also suggests that a post-structuralist

reading of the subject is one which is exclusively socially constructed and non-active, thereby a totalized subject. She states:

My disagreement occurs, however, when they seem totally to erase any room for manoeuvre by the individual within a social discourse or set of institutions. It is that totalization of history's imprint that I reject. In their defence of a total construction of the subject, post-structuralist deny the subject's ability to reflect on the social discourse and challenge its determinations (ibid.: 16-17).

Alcoff remarks that through a post-structuralist reading of the concept "woman", woman is reduced to a nominalistic concept. However, I think that this is a problematic reading of post-structuralism on Alcoff's part since many post-structuralist authors, such as Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva, posit the subject as possessing the ability to transcend the limitations of the symbolic. Hence, Alcoff has mistakenly placed a vision of a post-structuralist subject (one which, arguably, can or cannot exist) in a structuralist paradigm for evaluation. I believe it is this reading of post-structuralism for her cross-purposes that has led Alcoff to a mis-informed reading of post-structuralist thought.

Further, there are additional problems in Alcoff's reading of post-structuralist theory, namely Alcoff's notion of positionality. Her positing of positionality or the "third way", is dangerously close to being a manifestation of her so-called "nominalist" or undecidable post-structuralist reading of woman. It is evident through her criticisms of the unified subject of cultural feminists that she does not favour this model. Instead, Alcoff is attempting to theorise a subject which can be represented in a multiplicity. Alcoff is searching for a method through which woman can be represented in a diversified way, in a number of positions, without one coherent, overdetermining identity. That is, Alcoff is searching for a "third way" of constructing the subjectivity of woman. Describing her alternative approach, Alcoff states that:

This new alternative might share the post-structuralist insight that the category "woman" needs to be theorized through an exploration of the experience of the subjectivity, as opposed to a description of current attributes, but it need not concede that such an exploration will necessarily result in a nominalist position on gender, or an erasure of it (ibid.: 421).

Thus, Alcoff apparently directs herself towards a system of identity politics, while remaining critical of a fully modernist understanding of a unified totality of the subject woman.

In examining Alcoff's cursory look at cultural feminism as positioned in relation/opposition to post-structuralist feminism, I believe that she is able to make a move away from the problematic conceptualization of subjectivity found in the socialist feminism of Segal. However, in this move she retreats to a notion of "positionality", a form of identity politics, whereby she suggests that the subject of woman should be re-conceived in relation to each position and context in which woman is situated. Alcoff suggests that a metaphysical approach to an ontological evaluation of the feminist subject is possible, and that a project of metaphysics should not be abandoned. In other words, Alcoff makes two arguments: (1) that cultural feminists are not concerned with an ontological or metaphysical project devoid of biologism, and (2) that the post-structuralists have abandoned metaphysics in toto. However, when Alcoff makes this criticism of post-structuralist thought she reveals a flaw in her argumentation. I do not believe post-structuralist theorists have made the claim of being non-philosophers, even if they have positioned themselves as anti-philosophy. Rather, their work is clearly one of immanent critique and immersed within a tradition of western metaphysics which they do not deny. Alcoff presents a post-structuralism that is entirely collapsed and nullified, and has reduced their critique to pure nihilism. Alternatively, the proposal made by Alcoff suggests that the subject of woman is neither essentialised and universalised, nor is it nominalised. Alcoff's resistance to a post-structural-

ist reading of the subject (taking into consideration her misreading) suggests that a post-structuralist feminism would not lead to an emancipatory politic, but rather to a nihilistic disintegrated feminism.

Alcoff's concept of "positionality" is related to some of the ideas conveyed by Shane Phelan. Phelan begins her article, "Specificity Beyond Sexuality and Difference" by debunking the liberal-feminist sentiment that women should strive to be the equals of men: equals of white middle class men. Phelan, like Alcoff, supports a form of identity politics, as a means through which a dis-unified or un-centred subject of woman can be conceived. Instead of a politics of difference, Phelan, posits an alternative in "specificity". She suggests that the "experience" of "non-hegemonic" women has contributed to a growing complexity in feminism, and has led those women who form the hegemonic to recognize their privilege.

I am writing this, then, to develop an idea that for many feminists is not news, but that is still difficult and pressing for white bourgeois women. This concept, that of specificity, can function both as a methodological precept and as a substantive goal for politics. I will argue that the idea of specificity can bring together many of the currently diverse threads of feminism, and thus that it deserves serious consideration and development (Phelan, 1991: 129).

Phelan is attempting to articulate a need to look at difference in mainstream feminist theory, but in a way that does not fall into the traps of an unreflexive, or de-mobilised "difference". Phelan describes a need for a re-evaluation of the relationship between the individual and the community. It is through such a re-conceptualisation that Phelan hopes an equitable process of representation in the community can be achieved based on the individual's experience and history. However, even though I appreciate the provoking possibilities that can exist through a definition of specificity, I wonder whether an equitable representational politics can actually exist. By Phelan's identification of herself as a bourgeois

white woman will she be involved in a project of deconstructing her own position of privilege, or is she involved in the far more problematic project of re-articulating the experiences and works that "non-hegemonic" women have already attempted to theorise? In other words, does the deterritorialisation of the white subject necessarily follow the process of specificity laid out by Phelan, and is it even an issue that she can be interested in?

Thus feminist theorists need to integrate other differences into our analyses, not as adjuncts to studies of women's oppression, but into the heart of them. White feminists cannot pretend that we suffer from generic sexism; Spelman makes clear that the "generic" position is a product of power, and that as long as white feminists treat our position as generic, our feminism as "feminism", we will continue to obscure the situations and thoughts of other women, with implications as racist as those of the "first wave" of feminists who tried to buy their rights at the expense of racial and ethnic minorities (ibid.: 131).

Phelan's argument is one which does address the issue of the "centred white subject". She makes a move towards addressing the a priori subject of feminism and shows the inherent down-falls of the historical progression of feminist theory. But the question that remains is: can a theory be envisioned by which multiplicity can be actively manifested?

Phelan argues against a coalition politics, one that recognizes difference, that fights to build a bridge or a "thread" that binds together the various feminisms. Instead, Phelan suggests that in conjunction with the notion of heterogeneity, a recognition and articulation of "specificity" is in fact necessary to "deal with difference" and thus to truly pay heed to difference:

Specificity is the necessary complement to heterogeneity. A focus on specificity aims at destroying white bourgeois hegemony by making it manifest, just as feminism has aimed at destroying male hegemony by highlighting and questioning it. An emphasis on specificity in our analyses and practices

aims at disrupting hegemonies, calling out differences for question and rendering everyone accountable for her position and actions (ibid.: 133).

In Phelan's move towards a form of identity politics, it is not clear how identity politics works to further a problematic of contesting or dismantling the hegemonic structures that she also identifies. She wants to move to a politics that goes beyond a mere "pluralism", but what does she see as alternatives? There is a provision in her philosophy for a "shifting" overdeterminance of subject position, such that being a lesbian may at one time be more pertinent than being a white middle class woman. In this way she posits a model of identity politics that allows for a multiplicity of identities at any given time. However, my resistance to her interpretation of multiplicity is because her project is firmly attached to a centred subjectivity, which indicates to me that she wants to have the proverbial cake and eat it too. She states:

Specificity thus has a value as a political tool. It may form the basis of a new intellectual coalition among feminists, enabling us to cross some of the boundaries currently dividing "radical" from "socialist" from "postmodern" feminists. More local, specific, analysis then offers the possibility of locating the ways in which some women are silenced and erased the role/s (some) women play in that (ibid.:134).

Phelan argues that specificity allows for the recognition of the individual, although subverting the construction of the unitary subject. She suggests that postmodern theories are without foundation and suggest an end to theory altogether. Such a rendering of post-structuralist projects are highly problematic, as so-called postmodern theory can be characterized in a variety of ways, i.e. foundational in both a radical understanding, as well as a conservative one.

In closing, I would like to stress that the politics of multiple feminisms is, in itself, difficult to discuss because such discussion leads to a totalizing moment. By contextualizing the politics of difference or multiplicities, the

containment of what is excess or seepage is effected. And in so doing, the development of the politics of multiple feminisms signals an attempt to discuss that which cannot be contained in any one pre-existing feminist discourse, i.e. liberal feminism, socialist feminism, or radical feminism. Ultimately what the presentations and the (re) presentations that were discussed in this paper deal with are the ideas of representation, and of how the subject of woman is cast or re-cast in feminist theory. This process is a continual one, one which cannot be concretised. Instead what we must think, as terminators of subjectivity, is how to continue the project. Alcoff and Phelan suggest a politics of identity or positionality or specificity where each position carries with it a different nuanced reading of the subject woman. In her notion of positionality, Alcoff does not address issues of the individual nor the community while Phelan presents "woman" through her conception of specificity.

The problem I have with the projects discussed in this paper has mainly been related to the power structures which continue to discipline our modes of thought and expression. The boundaries which have established lines of racial, sexual, and class identities and subjectivities have not been fundamentally pushed, pulled, or distorted. I believe that it is, as of yet, too difficult to assert a project of identity politics, which relies, for many, on extremely problematic identities. As the comment by Lyotard at the beginning of this paper suggests, the war against totality is an ongoing one, but the potential for a true alteration of "the" project(s) remains out there for us. However, this reach must extend beyond our grasp otherwise the attempt will easily be recouped by the various projects of feminist resuscitation that have been described in this paper. Unfortunately, these boundaries of feminism will undoubtedly persist to repair and replicate themselves in the face of a collapse of identity. But it is this continual re-casting of ourselves that the termination of (white) subjecthood hopes to achieve. Thus, it is fitting that this project occurs in an era where the trope of a cyborgian transformative transgressive power exists for us

problématique

today. It is fitting that we have available to us the example of the "man" who is not the white(man) subject in process. Rather the terminator has no feelings, no emotions, no hate, no love - it has no pity, it cannot be bargained with, it will not stop until it has terminated its subject.

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Ma The (Seemingly) Inevitable Theory of the Joke

The (Seemingly) Inevitable Theory of the Joke in Film Criticism: or the Gain, the Laughter, the +/-, the Risible Visible, and the Loss of any Salvaging Project of Truth or Demystification in (My) Life Today

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In this paper, I want to look at film theory. However, to be truthful, I cannot without reservations simply look at film theory because there is something that comes before film theory that invalidates these excursions (for me) if left uninvestigated. That is, the premise of a critical theory, upon which the project of film theory is based, comes between my desire to investigate and/or participate in the meaning of film and the possibility of achieving insight. It is an obstructive premise that I meet with laughter. Thus, I am interested in looking at laughter when it occurs during or alongside the contemporary inability of (post)modern critical thought to comprehend something. I want to look at laughter as being