

Contradiction of Terms: Feminist Theory, Philosophy and Transdisciplinarity

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Abstract

This article addresses the question of the relation between disciplines and transdisciplinary practices and concepts through a discussion of the relationship between philosophy and the emblematically transdisciplinary practice of feminist theory, via a discussion of interdisciplinarity and related terms in gender studies. It argues that the tendency of philosophy to reject feminist theory, as alien to it as a discipline, is in a sense correct, to the extent that the two defining features of feminist theory – its constitutive tie to a political agenda for social change and the transdisciplinary character of many of its central concepts – are indeed at odds with, and pose a threat to, the traditional insularity of the discipline of philosophy. If feminist philosophy incorporates feminist theory, its transdisciplinary aspects thus open it up to an unavoidable contradiction. Nonetheless, I will argue, this is a contradiction that can and must be endured and made productive.

Keywords

critical theory, feminism, gender, philosophy, transdisciplinarity

What happens when well-defined disciplines meet or are confronted with transdisciplinary discourses and concepts, where transdisciplinary concepts are analytical tools rather than specifications of a field of objects or a class of entities? ‘Gender’, ‘race’, ‘structure’ and ‘art’ are perhaps exemplary transdisciplinary concepts in this respect. Or, if disciplines *reject* transdisciplinary discourses and concepts as having no part to play in their practice, why do they so reject them? This article will address these questions through a discussion of the relationship between philosophy – the most tightly policed discipline in the humanities – and what I will argue is the emblematically transdisciplinary practice of feminist theory,

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via a discussion of *interdisciplinarity* and related terms in gender studies. I will argue that the tendency of philosophy to reject feminist theory in fact correctly intuited that the two defining features of feminist theory – its constitutive tie to a political agenda for social change and the transdisciplinary character of many of its central concepts – are indeed at odds with, and pose a threat to, the traditional insularity of the discipline of philosophy. I will argue that feminist theory operates with what we should now recognize as a set of transdisciplinary concepts – including, sex, gender, woman, sexuality and sexual difference – and that the use of these concepts (particularly ‘gender’) in feminist philosophy has been the most far-reaching continuation in the late 20th/early 21st centuries of the critique of philosophy initiated by Marx and pursued by ‘critical theory’. This puts feminist *philosophy* in a difficult position: its transdisciplinary aspects open it up to an unavoidable contradiction. Nonetheless, I will argue, this is a contradiction that can and must be endured and made productive.

In order to draw out the specificity of the concept of transdisciplinarity at issue here I will begin with a discussion of attempts to define inter- and transdisciplinarity, particularly in gender studies. Arguing for the transdisciplinary origin of the concept of gender, I will then suggest one way of understanding its function as a *critical* concept, before making explicit how this leads to the historical antagonism between traditional philosophy and the critical, transdisciplinary concept of gender and with feminist theory more generally.

Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity in Gender Studies

First, then, what is ‘transdisciplinarity’, as this article proposes to understand it? How is it different from ‘inter’- and ‘multi’-disciplinarity? As Peter Osborne suggests in his introduction to the dossier on ‘Transdisciplinarity in French Thought’ (Osborne, 2011a: 16), one might take the definitions of inter- and multi-disciplinarity given by the major funding body for arts and humanities research in the UK (the AHRC) as a – soon to be transcended – starting point. According to these definitions, *interdisciplinarity* characterizes work by an individual that draws on more than one discipline, while *multidisciplinarity* characterizes work done by a team of individuals from more than one discipline. In each case the idea of specific disciplinary knowledges, concepts, practices and methods is maintained in the context of a recognition of the virtue of communication between them, according to the presumption that different disciplines can learn from each other and can contribute differently, but complementarily, to the analysis or understanding of a given phenomenon or problem. In distinction from these, the hypothesis here is that *transdisciplinary* theory and its concepts are not necessarily identifiable with any specific disciplinary fields, either in their origin or

application. In this article feminist theory in general and the concept of gender in particular will be a test case for this hypothesis.

According to the above AHRC definitions of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity, the latter is the more challenging practice – both for the practitioner herself and for the disciplines with which she intersects. However, the restricted scope of the AHRC definition of interdisciplinarity is clear when we consider that it in fact excludes most of the interdisciplinary *practice* of the past century, or at least most attempts at it. For intellectual cultures of interdisciplinarity and the literature that addresses it have tended to concern not lone researchers but collaborative ventures and fields of collective endeavour: the anti-disciplines, or non-disciplines or post-disciplines that circumscribe their fields as ‘studies’ – gender studies, feminist studies, psychosocial studies, critical race studies, translation studies, education studies, cultural studies, area studies, and so on.¹ This restriction is, of course, intentional. The AHRC’s definition of interdisciplinarity is stipulative, not descriptive; it concerns what, for the purposes of a grant application, shall be called ‘interdisciplinarity’. In contrast, where definitions are offered from within intellectual fields that claim to *practise* interdisciplinarity (rather than simply promise to fund it) we are offered what seem to be descriptive definitions. In these, much more is at stake than the clarity of terms. In gender studies,² for example, which I will concentrate on here not least because of the contrast with philosophy, the extensive literature on multi-, inter- and transdisciplinarity is concerned to a great extent with the nature of the field itself – its being-interdisciplinary – and with its institutionalization and institutional practices and forms: its modes of pedagogy, the construction of academic programmes, its modes of dissemination, and so on. An examination of the definitions of concepts of inter- and transdisciplinarity in some of this literature in gender studies and other fields will allow the specificity of the concept of transdisciplinarity proposed in this article to become visible.

Of course, different definitions of interdisciplinarity abound even within gender studies. Nevertheless, some consensus has emerged as to the definition of multidisciplinary and its difference from interdisciplinarity. In particular, interdisciplinarity is often said to ‘go beyond’ multidisciplinary, which tends to be seen as a somewhat conservative approach to the extent that it leaves disciplines and their various methodologies intact.³ Interdisciplinarity, in Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz’s words, goes beyond multidisciplinary in ‘carving out an area of study whose organizing theoretical and methodological frame is constructed from cross-disciplinary sources, so that a new synthetic field is created over time’ (quoted in Lykke, 2011: 139). In interdisciplinarity the insights from different disciplines do not accrue; they are mixed or blended. In interdisciplinary work one does not stay on one side of a boundary but straddles it, working on it (so-called ‘boundary work’); or,

disciplinary boundaries are not respected but rather crossed, or transgressed (Lykke, 2011: 142).⁴ The rhetoric of interdisciplinarity in gender studies often implies that there is always something admirably iconoclastic and transgressive about the interdisciplinary researcher. However, in other areas definitions of interdisciplinarity may be part of an aspiration to unity or even totality that might seem, from the perspective of gender studies, altogether more conventional.⁵ Claims about the interdisciplinarity of a field may also be presented as a matter of necessity, rather than a matter of laudable choice – for example in education studies and translation studies – and related to an aspiration to ‘disciplinarity’.⁶

For many theorists, the problem with interdisciplinarity remains its residual disciplinarity.⁷ In response, recent attempts to distinguish, further, a *transdisciplinary* practice in relation to gender studies have tended to see it as, in various ways, a higher-order, critical reflection on disciplines and on interdisciplinarity, which Hornscheidt and Baer, for example, describe as

a reflexive way of dealing with disciplines, rather than a move against or beyond them... Transdisciplinarity is based upon a systematically critical reflection on all disciplines, their agenda, methodology and established findings... *explicitly* reflexive research. (2011: 165, 171)⁸

Irene Dölling and Sabine Hark had earlier proposed a similar definition, in which transdisciplinarity involves ‘a critical evaluation of terms, concepts, and methods that transgresses disciplinary boundaries [that] can be a means to this higher level of reflexivity’ (2000: 1195). For them, this ‘epistemological and methodological strategy’ depends on the refusal of the idea of disciplines as ‘independent domains with clear boundaries’, characterizing them instead as always already (and from their inception) ‘shot through with cross-disciplinary pathways’ (2000: 1196). Dölling and Hark see transdisciplinarity as a way for gender studies to avoid the perils of institutionalization – that is, its disciplinarization. For them, transdisciplinarity, ‘characterized by a continual examination of artificially drawn and contingent boundaries and that which they exclude’ (2000: 1197), is essential for the future of gender studies, allowing it to ‘reflect on its own modes of knowledge production’ (2000: 1195), on ‘the contingency of its own premises and constructions’ (2000: 1197). Thus Dölling and Hark effectively recommend transdisciplinarity as something like Hornscheidt and Baer’s ‘reflexive way of dealing with disciplines’ in relation to gender studies *itself* as (or in danger of becoming) a discipline – transdisciplinarity or die.

In contrast, Nina Lykke’s definition of transdisciplinarity takes issue with the idea that it remains tied to the reflexive critique of disciplines. For Lykke, transdisciplinarity ‘goes beyond the boundaries of existing

disciplines. In the transdisciplinary mode research problems and thinking technologies are articulated in ways that are not “owned” by any specific discipline’ (2011: 142). This is a characterization that bears some resemblance to the science and technology studies’ understanding of transdisciplinarity as Mode 2 knowledge production.⁹ However, none of these competing characterizations is really part of a disagreement about the nature of a common practice; they are all, rather, different stipulative definitions of a word – less descriptions of practices than outlines of the shapes of their ideals. Of course, the problem of the transition from ideal to actuality – where what ought to be, is – has long been acknowledged. And this is as true of interdisciplinarity as it is of the higher-level transdisciplinary reflection that some of these authors propose here. That the difficulties in achieving ‘true’ interdisciplinarity should not be underestimated is made clear in the report from the Practicing Interdisciplinarity group of the research project ‘Travelling Concepts in Feminist Pedagogy: European Perspectives’.¹⁰ The ‘Travelling Concepts’ project was ‘dedicated to mapping and interrogating movements of key concepts in feminist theory within and across Europe’. The contribution to this project of the Practicing Interdisciplinarity group focused on the concept of interdisciplinarity, setting out from the acknowledgement that, despite the ubiquity of claims to an actual or ideal interdisciplinarity in gender and feminist studies, the precise meaning of the concept and the extension of the practices actually covered by it remain unclear. This was connected to their ‘shared experience of disappointment that a claim to interdisciplinarity in feminist teaching or research often turns out to be a misleading description of what might be more accurately termed *multi-disciplinarity*’ (Demény et al., 2006: 8).

As part of the attempt to overcome this, the Practicing Interdisciplinarity group offer their own definition: ‘interdisciplinarity involves working at the interstices of disciplines, in order to challenge those boundaries as part of extending possible meanings and practices’, constituting a ‘spatio-ethical challenge to disciplinary boundaries’ (Demény et al., 2006: 54).¹¹ This connects to their earlier finding that it is a focus on the ‘critical relationships among disciplinary fields’ that mitigates against self-styled ‘interdisciplinarity’ sliding into an unwitting multidisciplinarity. Referring to Lykke’s definition, they suggest that ‘transdisciplinarity’ (in feminist studies specifically) goes ‘beyond disciplines and beyond existing canons’, perhaps ‘creating a new theoretical canon for feminist studies’ or ‘proposing feminist studies as a discipline in its own right’ – an outcome towards which the authors are strikingly ambivalent (Demény et al., 2006: 51, 63–4).

Differences and disagreements apart, the common point in all of the literature discussed here is in the presumption that inter- and transdisciplinarity in gender studies – however they are defined – refer to practices and forms of institutional or intellectual collaboration: research

methodologies, research programmes, institutionally defined intellectual groupings and, *mutatis mutandis*, relations between disciplines and new ‘transdisciplines’ or ‘postdisciplines’. The Practicing Interdisciplinarity group identified different disciplinary methodologies as the major intellectual stumbling block in interdisciplinary endeavours (Demény et al., 2006: 46).¹² Perhaps the *idea* of a transdisciplinary method is in part a response to this, but the findings of the Practicing Interdisciplinarity group suggest that the actual practice of transdisciplinary methods in gender studies may be elusive.

Have Concept, Will Travel

Without disagreeing with either the aspiration towards or the actual practice of inter- and transdisciplinarity as these authors understand it, the idea proposed here – that gender is a specifically transdisciplinary *concept* – suggests something else. Of course, the foregrounding of concepts in interdisciplinary fields is not new. Indeed, the title of the research programme of the Practicing Interdisciplinarity group was ‘Travelling Concepts in Feminist Pedagogy: European Perspectives’. This is borrowed from Mieke’s Bal’s *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (2002), and we can see that some of the findings echo Bal’s starting point too. Bal argues in *Travelling Concepts* that the main problem faced by the would-be-interdisciplinary scholar in the humanities is that of method. Whereas one might have expected new ‘inter-disciplines’ – particularly cultural studies (and, we might add, gender studies) – to have developed a new methodology ‘to counter the exclusionary methods of the separate disciplines’, they have not; old disciplinary methods tend to reassert themselves, even where new fields of objects for analysis have opened up (2002: 6–7). Bal’s wager, then, is that ‘interdisciplinarity in the humanities, necessary, exciting, serious, must seek its heuristic and methodological basis in *concepts* rather than *methods*’ (2002: 5). To explain this, Bal presents us with a little vignette:

A philosopher, a psychoanalytic critic, a narratologist, an architectural historian, and an art historian are talking together in a seminar about, say, ‘signs and ideologies’. Eager young scholars, excited, committed. The word ‘subject’ comes up and keeps recurring. With growing bewilderment, the first participant assumes the topic is the rise of individualism; the second sees it as the unconscious; the third, the narrator’s voice; the fourth, the human confronted with space; and the fifth, the subject matter of a painting or, more sophisticatedly, the depicted figure. This could be just amusing, if only all five did not take their interpretation of ‘subject’, on the sub-reflective level of obviousness, to be the only right one. They are, in their own eyes, just ‘applying a method’. Not because they

are selfish, stupid, or uneducated, but because their disciplinary training has never given them the opportunity, or a reason, to consider the possibility that such a simple word as 'subject' might, in fact, be a concept. (2002: 5–6)

Bal identifies three principal roots of this confusion of tongues: the tendency to conflate words ('from everyday language') and concepts; lack of attention to the fact that a concept may have 'travelled' from one discipline to another and got 'muddled in a mixed setting'; and the partial overlap of concepts that 'is an inevitable consequence of their creation and subsequent adjustment within the separate disciplines . . . this overlap leads to their confused and vague use in interdisciplinary work' (2002: 26, 25, 14). To move from 'a muddled multidisciplinary to a productive interdisciplinarity', Bal thus advocates that we get clear about our concepts, but not in the manner of analytical philosophy. Concepts, obviously, will never be univocal terms. But Bal suggests that in 'groping to define, provisionally and partly, what a particular concept may *mean*, we gain an insight into what it can *do*'. Our concepts thus (provisionally, partly) defined can act as beacons with which we might orient ourselves in the 'labyrinthine land of a humanities without boundaries' (2002: 25, 11, 8). *Travelling Concepts* devotes each chapter to a 'case study' of a concept that has travelled from one place (ordinary language, a discipline, a practice) to another. She discusses, for example, the travel of the concept of *mise-en-scène* from theatre to psychoanalysis (in Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*), a journey in which, for Bal, *mise-en-scène* precisely *becomes* a concept, or a 'conceptual tool' (2002: 129) capable of articulating the 'staging' of the subject, and not just an artistic practice.¹³ In another chapter Bal refers to Jonathan Culler's account of the travels of the concept of the performative (or performativity) from philosophy, to literature, to gender studies, and confronts this with the different journey of the concept of 'performance' whose 'home', she writes, 'is not philosophy of language but aesthetics' (2002: 179).

At one point, where the distinction between inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinarity is explicitly broached, Bal describes the 'inter-disciplinary' itinerary of the concept of 'focalization':

After travelling first from the visual domain to narratology, then to the more specific analysis of visual images, focalization, having arrived at its new destination, visual analysis, has received a meaning that overlaps neither with the old visual one – focusing with a lens – nor with the new narratological one – the cluster of perception and interpretation that guides the attention through the narrative.

This travelling from one discipline to another, undergoing change in the process, is – according to Bal – 'inter-disciplinary' as opposed to

‘transdisciplinary’, as the latter would ‘presuppose its immutable rigidity, a travelling without changing’ (2002: 39). Just over one decade later it seems odd that ‘trans’ should evoke ‘immutable rigidity’; which just goes to show that ‘trans’ prefixes can travel too. Bal continues: ‘to call it “multidisciplinary” would be to subject the fields of the two disciplines to a common analytic tool’; that is, one presumes, to apply the same concept in different disciplines indifferently. Neither the trans- nor the multi-option is viable for Bal: ‘Instead, a negotiation, a transformation, a reassessment is needed at each stage’ (2002: 39).¹⁴

Presuming that no one wants to defend ‘immutable rigidity’, how, then, does Bal’s notion of interdisciplinarity differ from what I am proposing here as transdisciplinarity? It is not Bal’s concern to map either the birth of concepts or their history. Nevertheless, certain claims are made about where concepts (or their embryonic selves, ‘words’) come from, and the extended metaphors of ‘travel’ does suggest that they begin their journey somewhere. Sometimes this is quite explicit, for example with the origin of the *mise-en-scène* in theatre, of focalization in optics and of hybridity in biology, and in the claim that ‘the home of the word *performance* is . . . aesthetics’. Indeed the disciplinary origins of concepts are often identified as the source of some of the confusion or muddle that ensues when they begin to travel, and when concepts become, once more, mere words or – worse – labels (2002: 24, 179, 17). However, the specificity of what I am here calling ‘transdisciplinary’ concepts is that they are, precisely, *not* identifiable with any specific disciplinary fields, either in their origin or in their application. This is not to say that they were necessarily conceived as such from the off, or purposively created to *be* transdisciplinary, but that this is the manner of their emergence and their functioning, in so far as they are theoretically significant. A case study of our own, concerning the concept of gender in feminist theory, will hopefully justify this claim. Indeed, an account of the transdisciplinary functioning of the concept of gender may be exemplary in relation to all transdisciplinary concepts.

Gender and Feminist Theory

Unlike the concepts that Bal traces, ‘gender’, *in its transdisciplinary form* – that is, its *feminist* form – is a relatively recent construction. To track the emergence of the concept of gender is, necessarily, to track its relation to another concept – sex – or to track the emergence of the sex/gender distinction. It would not be possible to give a comprehensive picture of this theoretical history here, but nor is it necessary. In order to make the point that the feminist concept of gender is a transdisciplinary one, I will therefore limit myself to the discussion of just a couple of emblematic examples. Further, as we shall see, the fact that the meaning of the term is contested will not mean that it is necessary to choose one definition from

among many, when the point is precisely that this internal diversity of meaning belongs to the very concept itself.

One common narrative of the origin of the concept of gender in its conceptual distinction from sex begins with Robert Stoller's psychoanalytical theory (Stoller, 1968), and tracks the swift reception and deployment of the theoretical distinction in feminist work in different disciplines. Stoller was clear that 'sex' was a biological term. But his concept of 'gender' – as he was the first to admit – is more difficult to pin down,¹⁵ encompassing, in a sense, everything that is related to the fact of sex division and that is yet not itself 'biological'. Abstracting from biological sex we are left with 'tremendous areas of behaviour, feelings, thoughts, and fantasies that are related to the sexes and yet do not have primarily biological connotations. It is for some of these psychological phenomena that the term *gender* will be used' (Stoller, 1968: ix).

In fact Stoller credited Freud (and in particular his *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*) with the insight that led to the terminological distinction between sex and gender: the insight that 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are not bound to sex in a 'one-to-one relationship' (Stoller, 1968: ix).¹⁶ For Stoller, 'gender role' is 'the overt behaviour one displays in society, the role which he [sic] plays, especially with other people, to establish his position with them insofar as his and their evaluation of his gender is concerned' (Stoller, 1968: 10).¹⁷ 'Gender identity' – which is the main topic of *Sex and Gender* – is the knowledge and awareness of being either male or female, one's sense of being either a man or a woman. But although Stoller thus, in principle, distinguishes a social or cultural realm of 'gender', in relation to which a psychological notion of 'gender identity' is developed, he effectively conflates 'gender' with 'gender identity', such that 'gender' tends to function in *Sex and Gender* as itself a psychological category. Thus although his central conclusion in *Sex and Gender* is that gender identity is learned, not biologically determined (Stoller, 1968: xiii), the focus is always less on the broader social or relational aspects of gender, in favour of the individual's sense of him- or herself as male or female – what Stoller called the 'core gender identity' (Stoller, 1968: 29–46).

If, then, we trace the feminist distinction between sex and gender back to Stoller's work, we would have to say that his feminist readers were productively interpreting awry. Ann Oakley's statement of the distinction in *Sex, Gender and Society* – which was published in 1972 and includes a long discussion of Stoller – presents the distinction in its classic early form. Oakley echoes Stoller with the claim that "'Sex" is a biological term: "gender" a psychological and cultural one' (1972: 158), but the addition of 'society' to the 'sex' and 'gender' of her title and the – actually extremely subtle – feminist orientation of her analysis turns 'gender' into a *critical* term for social analysis, when it was nothing like this for Stoller.¹⁸ When, in 1980, Michèle Barrett, in the context of a discussion

of women's oppression, reiterated the distinction between the biological category of sex and the 'social' category of gender (Barrett, 1980: 13), and insisted that 'any feminism [including Marxist feminism] must insist on the specific character of gender relations... to identify the operation of gender relations' (1980: 9), the implicit critical function of 'gender' is again brought to the fore. Identifying certain social phenomena in terms of gender was to historicize them – to render their contingency visible – against their naturalization in terms of sex.

But it is a curious irony that both sex/gender feminists and their ideological opponents – the apologists for existing inequality and oppression – largely shared a concept of sex, even if the defenders of the sexual status quo had no concept of gender. Barrett, for example, identified sex difference – or biological differences more generally – as simply existing at a level of reality not open to question. Drawing on the work of the Italian Marxist Sebastiano Timpanaro (*On Materialism*, first published 1975), Barrett wrote that 'sex differences, along with other biological characteristics of human beings, ... form part of the raw material on which social relations are constructed and which they transform in the course of history'. Thus Barrett asserts her materialist credentials, accepting, further – rhetorical hesitations notwithstanding – the idea of the 'biological liabilities' (again, Timpanaro's phrase) of the 'female condition' (Barrett, 1980: 74, 75).

Others, however, drew different conclusions. In an essay first published in 1991, Christine Delphy, for example, claims that 'The notion of gender developed from that of sex roles, and, rightly or wrongly, the person who is credited with being the founding mother of this line of thought is [anthropologist] Margaret Mead' (Delphy, 2000: 63). Referring to Mead's *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (1935), Delphy ties the emergence of 'gender' to the foundational anthropological distinction between nature and culture and traces its development (via the *critical* development of the idea of sex roles) in sociology. Delphy cites Oakley's book – 'one of the first works directly on "gender"' (Delphy, 2000: 65) – but notes that its definition of gender lacks what the earlier sociological work on 'sex roles' had, crucially, made central to their analyses: asymmetry and hierarchy (although Oakley cites some of the same feminist sociologists to whom Delphy refers: Mathilde Vaerting, Mirra Komarovsky and Viola Klein). For Delphy the 'arrival of the concept of gender' did not place it side by side with sex, marking off a realm of cultural or socially constructed (and thus mutable) phenomena from the realm of biology. As a singular term it allowed the emphasis to shift from the two divided parts of sex to the 'principle of partition itself' and, as the 'idea of hierarchy was firmly anchored in the concept', it 'allowed the relation between the divided parts to be considered from another angle' (Delphy, 2000: 66). Tracing the genealogy of the concept of gender to the idea of 'sex roles',

inextricably tied to social status, Delphy describes the perspective in which they now both appear as ‘sociological in the true sense of the word: people’s situations and activities are held to derive from the social structure, rather than from either nature or their particular capacities’. Thus the stage is set for the explanatory priority of gender as a social relation, with sex relegated, as it were, to the mark of a social division: ‘sex is a sign’ (Delphy, 2000: 64, 69). If for Barrett it was the *affirmation* of the natural reality of sex that made a feminist also a materialist, for Delphy it was, on the contrary, the *refusal* of the category of sex as natural.¹⁹

Of course one could cite very many other accounts of the emergence of the sex/gender distinction and trace very many other possible genealogies, in relation to different national, continental and global concerns. Together these different accounts would build a complex picture of the historical ‘invention’ of the concept of gender. I have made no attempt to be comprehensive here because the aim is not to write that complex history but merely to indicate the transdisciplinary mode of emergence of the critical feminist concept of gender. If one were to attempt to write that complex history one would no doubt find that different narratives of the development of the concept of gender would contest each other, and one could then, if one was so inclined, pursue the project of working out which of them is most accurate. But that would be to overlook the ongoing *collective* construction of the concept. Perhaps we could say that each part of this intellectual history continues to circulate in a discontinuous construction, not of *a* concept of gender, but a dynamic conceptual constellation of constructions of gender. To this extent ‘gender’ has not been quieted by being subject to any definition, and this may be precisely because it did not come from, has not and will not be settled into, any one discipline or even inter-discipline in particular – that is, because it is a *transdisciplinary* concept.

One does not have to look far to see that the critique of the sex/gender distinction as it appears in, for example, Oakley and Barrett, was almost immediately part of the ongoing construction of the concept of gender. In fact ‘gender’ quickly outgrew its opposition to sex, in a series of theoretical moves (most familiarly in Delphy, Wittig and Butler) that drew ‘sex’ itself into question.²⁰ Further, the critique of the presumption that feminist work in other languages could always be translated into the anglophone sex/gender distinction – and indeed resistance to the conceptual hegemony of the anglophone distinction – has now become part of critical reflection on its introduction and use.²¹ But feminists (and not just anglophone ones) continue to use the category of gender; some of us continue to speak of gender studies and gender critique and gender analysis because in certain contexts we continue to find it an indispensable critical, transdisciplinary concept.

Critical Transdisciplinarity

What, then, is transdisciplinarity, such that we can say that gender is a transdisciplinary concept? In beginning a collective attempt to construct a concept of transdisciplinarity,²² my colleagues and I set out from the contention that, in the late-20th century (from the early 1970s, let us say), the humanities, in the English-speaking world, *but with the notable exception of mainstream philosophy*, were transformed by the reception of a set of mainly French and German transdisciplinary texts or discourses published or originating in the middle of the 20th century. These include Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, amongst many significant others. This reception took place in a range of specific disciplinary contexts (especially English literary studies, and the 'new' disciplines of cultural studies, film studies and, later, postcolonial studies), at the same time as feminist theory was all over the humanities and social science – again, with the notable exception of mainstream philosophy. A few years later the same could perhaps be said of the influence of critical race theory.

Accustomed as we are to assigning works to disciplines, some of these texts might now be thought of as belonging to 'continental philosophy', or as having a right to belong to philosophy understood more broadly (as in the case of *The Second Sex*, which some have argued deserves to be included in the canon of philosophy, thus stamping it with the mark of the discipline). Some of this work belongs to the German tradition of 'critical theory', associated with the Institute for Social Research, originally based in Frankfurt. In the 1970s and 1980s German critical theory, along with the theoretical work of various, heterogeneous but broadly leftist, French writers including Lacan, Foucault, Barthes, Deleuze, and so on, were received into the anglophone humanities – again, largely excluding philosophy – and put to work to further produce what was sometimes called 'high theory' or simply 'Theory'.²³ Both German critical theory and the relevant theoretical discourses from France were explicitly – constitutionally – critical of the dominant disciplinary forms of philosophy to the extent that these dominant forms were, or conceived themselves to be, 'self-sufficient', in Marx's sense – independent of and uninfluenced by any empirical content: idealist and thereby (unwittingly) ideological.²⁴ If these German and French works are still, nevertheless, 'philosophical' – and still laying claim, some of them, to the title of 'philosophy' – it is in part because of their relation to the history of philosophy; because of their universalist aspirations (albeit a universal viewed historically); and because they still involve conceptual abstraction at the highest level – the traditional practice of philosophy – yet with an insistence on the social and historical conditions of possibility for such

abstractions, along with their *use* in the *criticism* of what Marx and Engels, in *The German Ideology*, rather straightforwardly call ‘reality’ (1974: 41, 48).

Of course, none of these texts – not even Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* – proposed a concept of gender; far from it. But we can now see what the transdisciplinary field of feminist theory, from which the concept of gender did arise, shares with this tradition of critique. The model for this is Marx’s critique of political economy, which did not just criticize existing theories of political economy, but proposed a new set of categories, at once both political-economic and philosophical in form – abstract labour, labour-power, value-form, and so on. People tend to misinterpret Marx’s relation to philosophy as a rejection of it; in fact the overcoming of classical German philosophy was, for Marx, its *transformation* into critique. Critique – or its theoretical result, critical theory – is the name for *a transformed practice of philosophy*, no longer self-sufficient and idealist but historically and practically based and materialist.

There are, of course, traditions of Marxist feminist theory that share their intellectual roots with critical theory. But, unlike critical theory, Marxist feminist theory was very little interested in the criticism of philosophy – it was more interested in the criticism of Marxism – and we do not tend to number amongst the many varieties of feminist theory something like a ‘critical theory’ variant. However, as Kate Soper pointed out in 1989, there is a sense in which feminist critique *is* critical theory. In fact, Soper drew attention to what she called ‘the distinctly “Marxian” character of feminist criticism’, which was not to say that all feminists are Marxists – Soper saw that that would be an absurd claim – but that ‘feminist argument conforms with the theoretical exercise conducted by Marx under the name of “critique” in fusing critical and substantive elements. The Marxist critique, *in explaining the source in reality of the cognitive shortcomings of the theory under attack*, called for changes in reality itself’ (1989: 93). This means that feminist theory, just in so far as it is *feminist*, is constructed with an emancipatory aim: it is not politically neutral, and it conceives of itself as practical criticism. Further, the process of feminist critique is such that in criticizing the terms – the philosophical presuppositions – of a given theory or ideology, it proposes new terms (this, I think, is what Soper means by ‘substantive elements’). One of the new terms proposed by feminist theory in its criticism of existing theories or ideologies was that of ‘gender’. This means that the category of gender does not just slot in alongside the existing terms upon which any given theoretical structure is based; rather, it destabilizes that structure and is part of the proposal to build another.

The critical practice of feminist theory is, as I said before, a transdisciplinary practice. It operates with what we should now, I suggest, recognize as a set of transdisciplinary concepts, including, sex, gender,

woman, sexuality and sexual difference.²⁵ At least one of these is required for a feminist theory. Historically, however, the most important of these in anglophone theory is probably ‘gender’. There *may* be specific disciplinary uses of the term ‘gender’; other specific uses of the term *may* be intra-disciplinarily defined. But the theoretical productivity of the concept of ‘gender’ in feminist theory is down to its transdisciplinary functioning. We may take Judith Butler’s early work to be emblematic of the productive deployment of a transdisciplinary concept of gender.

Philosophy: The Recalcitrant Discipline

So, to return to our original question: what happens when well-defined disciplines meet or are confronted with transdisciplinary discourses and concepts? Or, if disciplines *reject* transdisciplinary discourses and concepts, why do they so reject them? Joan Scott’s famous essay from 1986, ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’, goes some way towards answering this in her reflection on the encounter between the discipline of history and the transdisciplinary concept of gender; although, of course, Scott herself does not use the vocabulary of ‘trans-disciplinarity’. Scott distinguished between descriptive and analytic uses of the concept of ‘gender’ by historians, a distinction that holds good across other disciplines. In stark contrast with philosophy, the incursion of ‘gender’ into history was already so advanced by 1986 that Scott was in a position to criticize feminist historians’ uses of it. In philosophy in 1986 feminists were still slapping each other on the back if any of them had managed to smuggle it in anywhere. That was the year of the first issue of *Hypatia* as a stand-alone academic journal of feminist philosophy,²⁶ only three years after the first special issue of *Radical Philosophy* on ‘Women, Gender and Philosophy’, in which the issue editor, Alison Assiter, wrote of the dearth of feminist writing in philosophy compared with literary studies, economics and the social sciences more generally (Assiter, 1983: 1).

Scott criticized the descriptive uses of the concept of gender by feminist historians, uses in which, at their simplest, “‘gender’ is a synonym for “women””, associated with the study of things related to women (Scott, 1986: 1056). According to Scott, the descriptive approach has no power to address or change existing disciplinary paradigms²⁷ (a problem which, *mutatis mutandis*, would, as we have seen, echo through discussions of multi- and interdisciplinarity in gender studies). Gender as an analytic category, on the other hand, was, Scott writes, introduced into the discipline of history precisely with the intention of challenging and transforming disciplinary paradigms and dominant disciplinary concepts – to transform the nature of the discipline of history itself. Thus we can see, I think, how Scott’s work is part of that tradition of feminist critique identified by Soper. For Scott ‘gender’ is a ‘new’ category that allows us

to question the assumptions of existing theoretical discourses (which we may or may not want to call ideological) and to provide the basis for a more adequate understanding of social phenomena. Accordingly, it is not difficult to see why any discipline is likely to refuse or react with *some* hostility to the incursion of a transdisciplinary concept like gender. For it does not just find a place for itself within existing theoretical discourses or present itself as a new object to them; it challenges them to transform themselves according to its demands. (This is also why orthodox Marxism finds 'gender' difficult.) It is not difficult to see, further, why it should be the discipline of philosophy that has been most resistant and hostile to feminist theory and its transdisciplinary concepts. It is because philosophy has so much invested in distinguishing itself from other disciplines on the basis of its conceptual self-sufficiency, in policing its own boundaries and hanging on to its understanding of itself as a self-sufficient discipline, that it rejected this challenge from the outside.

Different national contexts and different philosophical traditions mean that there is not just one story to be told about the relation between feminism and philosophy. But on the whole, in the English-speaking world, mainstream philosophy resisted feminism, and one of its main tactics was to deny that feminist philosophy was in fact 'philosophy' at all. Insofar as the concerns of feminist philosophy were thought to have something to do with gender, they were, for example, said to be the domain of sociology, not properly philosophical concerns. Readers outside of the academic discipline of philosophy may be puzzled by this characterization of philosophy, especially if they work in or across those disciplines and interdisciplines and fields in which 'continental' philosophy has been welcomed. But the claim is about the traditional, hegemonic academic discipline of philosophy, which generally continues to deny the legitimacy of 'continental' philosophy.²⁸ However, if mainstream philosophy – that is, Anglo-American style analytical philosophy – rejected both inter- and transdisciplinarity and feminist theory, a certain kind of feminist philosophy embraced both with vigour. In her Inaugural Professorial Lecture in 1996, Margaret Whitford summed this up well:

A feminist researcher is obliged to be interdisciplinary, with all the problems that this entails. I use the term 'feminist researcher' here for short, to refer to all those engaged in the different types of research which involve the generation, exploration or application of feminist theory. In the area where I would situate myself, for example, that of feminist philosophy, once one takes 'gender' as an analytical category – whether this is seen as an empirical or as a conceptual category – one is more or less obliged to see what has happened to the concept in adjacent disciplines. And once one posits a structure as systemic, the supporting evidence cannot be

confined to one discipline only, but gains in weight and plausibility from making links with evidence or arguments in other disciplines. Although without aspiring to the comprehensiveness of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, most feminist researchers in philosophy also read work in other fields – political theory, sociology, intellectual history, anthropology, literary theory, film theory, psychology, psychoanalytic theory – to name only the most obvious. . . . As an absolute minimum, we have to know about our own subject, plus feminist theory. (1996: 33–34)

If this is not the case with the growing field of analytical feminist philosophy, this explains why it has no audience outside of the discipline, narrowly defined.

Mainstream philosophy's initial rejection of feminism was obviously narrow-minded and short-sighted. But, in fact, when those hostile to feminist philosophy saw in it something that was *not* philosophy, or *not* generated from within philosophy itself, they were quite right. Because the life-blood of feminist philosophy was *feminist theory*, which did not owe its origins to philosophy. A quick survey of recent articles on the multi-disciplinary origins of feminist theory confirms this. To take just one example, in the first issue of the UK journal *Feminist Theory* (in 2000), the editors note the generation of feminist theory from within the social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s and the subsequent shift to theoretical production in literary and cultural studies. Other contributors to this issue of *Feminist Theory* mention other disciplines as well; but not one of them mentions philosophy. No one outside of philosophy even notices the absence of philosophy in their lists; philosophy is simply irrelevant.²⁹

As with gender studies, in attempts to specify the nature of feminist theory its inter- or multidisciplinary character is frequently mentioned as one of its defining and academically most positive features. But in disputes over the definition and nature of feminist theory – particularly from within women's studies – what was primarily at issue for most discussants was not the relation between feminist theory and any specific discipline, or the disciplines in general, or disciplinarity, but the relation between feminist theory and *practice*, that is, *politics*. Thus we can say that two constitutive features of feminist theory do indeed set it radically at odds with the traditional self-understanding of philosophy as an academic discipline. First, feminist theory is explicitly tied to a political agenda for social change. Second, in contrast to mainstream philosophy feminist theory is a *transdisciplinary* practice, dependent on transdisciplinary concepts.

Further, the disciplinary specificity of philosophy that predisposes it against transdisciplinary feminist theory is at the same time what

predisposes it against becoming critical theory. If feminist theory is feminist critique this means that 'feminist philosophy' is, in a sense – just as those anti-feminist philosophers always suspected – something of a contradiction in terms, *but for completely different reasons than they thought*. Feminist philosophy is a contradiction not because, *as feminist*, it *fails* to live up to or to conform to some ideal of philosophy. On the contrary, it is contradictory precisely because it *succeeds* in being philosophy. The rich traditions of feminist epistemology, feminist metaphysics, feminist phenomenology, feminist philosophy of science and so on, as well as the fully-fledged feminist philosophy of sex and gender, amply demonstrate this. But feminist philosophy remains contradictory because, with its roots in feminist theory as a transdisciplinary practice of critique, it is the demand for the overcoming of philosophy, in Marx's sense; that is, as we might put it now, the initial demand that it become – like feminist theory itself – critical theory.³⁰ But this is just what traditional philosophy, to the extent that it understands itself as a self-sufficient discipline, cannot do. Its limitation – of which it is perversely proud – results in what Whitford called a 'schizoid fission' between itself and other forms of thought: its 'defensive logic of exclusion makes it impossible to allow metabolic thought through contact with something other than itself' (Whitford, 1996: 38).

This clearly puts feminist philosophy in a difficult position, for it is part of the social and institutional reality that it criticizes. Marx and the Marxist tradition of critical theory eschewed the name 'philosophy' in favour of 'critique', 'practical materialism', and 'critical theory', partly in order to distinguish themselves from the ideological self-understanding of the old philosophy. However today, from within the academy, there are good political reasons to hang on to 'philosophy' and for feminists to hang on to the word, to name what they do 'feminist philosophy'.³¹ To the extent that 'feminist philosophy' is a contradiction in terms it is therefore a contradiction that must be sustained as a *productive* contradiction. It cannot be resolved by rejecting philosophy or ceding it to its traditional self-understanding, which would only repeat the error of what Marx called the 'practical political party', because 'You cannot transcend [*aufheben*] philosophy without realizing [*verwirklichen*] it' (Marx, 1992: 250). At the same time, however, feminist philosophy cannot realize itself, and cannot pit itself against a reality to be transformed, without taking account of the way in which feminist philosophy, as philosophy, belongs to this reality. Philosophy cannot be realized without being transcended, that is, without critique of philosophy, which for feminist philosophy means not without critique of itself *as philosophy*.

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Notes

1. Granted, teaching programmes and the building of institutions are outside of the remit of the AHRC; but the point holds in relation to collaborative research too.
2. From here on I use ‘gender studies’ (lower case) as shorthand to include gender studies, feminist studies, women’s studies and masculinity studies. In this I follow Tuija Pulkkinen (2015).
3. Thus Antje Lann Hornscheidt and Susanne Baer: ‘we consider multidisciplinary as a concept which is more relevant to mainstream research than to critical gender studies’ (2011: 165).
4. A similar distinction between multi- and interdisciplinarity is drawn in Paul Stenner and David Taylor’s discussion of the emerging ‘transdisciplinary’ field of psychosocial studies, and in particular its deployment in critical social policy studies of welfare (see Stenner and Taylor, 2008: 429–30).
5. See, for example, Rege Colet and Tardif (2008: 17–18), who argue that across different definitions of interdisciplinarity three common principles emerge: that of the conceptual, theoretical and methodological integration of the disciplines; that of the collaboration between representatives of the disciplines; and that of the expected result – that (ideally) integration and collaboration might take the form of a synthesis leading to a “non-disciplinary” conception of “reality”. They similarly quote definitions of transdisciplinarity that aim at ‘the unity of knowledge’ (2008: 18).
6. In relation to translation studies see, for example, Malmkjaer (2005: 21) and Bassnett-McGuire (1998: xi).
7. See, for example, Stenner and Taylor (2008: 431): ‘Both multi- and interdisciplinarity, then, remain disciplinary in form since the goals of such research remain discipline-centred, even as they transform and give rise to new disciplines.’
8. In fact, Hornscheidt and Baer’s definition of interdisciplinary work is difficult, ultimately, to distinguish from their ‘transdisciplinarity’: ‘interdisciplinary work . . . means more than adding and in a simple sense combining knowledge. By elucidating approaches chosen within disciplines and articulating their limitations, a sharp awareness of the disciplines’ varying ways to produce knowledge can be developed, including a critical assessment of the questions posed, the theories applied and the methods used, as well as the disciplinary genre conventions governing how research is re/presented’ (2011: 170).
9. Indeed, Lykke (2011: 139) identifies the point of emergence of the concept of transdisciplinarity precisely in the work of the authors associated with Mode 2 knowledge production: Gibbons et al. (1994) and Nowotny et al. (2001). Lykke’s definition of transdisciplinarity is taken up in, for example, Sari Irni (2013: 348). Stenner and Taylor (2008: 430), whilst not endorsing the ‘somewhat utilitarian and pragmatic’ conception of transdisciplinarity as Mode 2 knowledge production, similarly see the specificity of transdisciplinarity in its ‘going beyond’.
10. Conducted under the umbrella of the Athena Network Project pursued by researchers and teachers from various women’s and gender studies’ programmes across Europe (see Demény et al., 2006, and www.athena2.org).

11. Whereas those gender studies' programmes 'housed within a discipline tend to focus on "gendering" the particular discipline in question' (Demény et al., 2006: 54), opening it up to gender issues without fundamentally challenging it.
12. Although the groups found that the major obstacles to genuinely interdisciplinary programmes were institutional (see Demény et al., 2006, especially 'Institutional Contexts of Interdisciplinarity I, II, and III', pp. 38–62), the institutional obstacles principally concern resources. For example, the group argue convincingly that for true interdisciplinarity to emerge in team-taught programmes, the teaching team should be familiar with each other's disciplines, but institutional resources (for these purposes translated into allocations on individuals' timetables) rarely allow individuals the time to attend each other's lectures, etc. Darbellay (2005: 13–14) identifies four principal obstructions to inter- and transdisciplinary research: epistemological [or perhaps methodological]; institutional; psycho-sociological; and cultural (including different languages and 'mentalities').
13. See Bal (2002: ch. 3, esp. 106–111). Bal also claims in Chapter 3 that 'a concept from artistic practice – *mise-en-scène* – is deployed as a theoretical concept for cultural analysis' (2002: 15).
14. Earlier, however, referring back to her previous work, Bal writes that 'narrative' and 'focalization' 'are, in fact, good examples of *transdisciplinary* concepts'. "Narrative" is thus a transdisciplinary concept (2002: 10, 11). This is perhaps an auto-critique of Bal's earlier presumptions about narrative ('at some point I realized that the reason I saw narrative in this way had to do with the concept of narrative that I had unreflectively endorsed'; 2002: 11); but it seems to be a contradiction in relation to focalization, at least. It is perhaps surprising that the shared prefix of 'transdisciplinarity' and 'transformation' did not catch this wordsmith's attention.
15. In *Sex and Gender* Stoller writes that his 'sidestepping a serious attempt to define *gender* and *gender identity*' will be evident to his reader (Stoller, 1968: xi).
16. See, for example, the footnote added to the 1915 edition of the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Freud, 2001: 219–20), where Freud distinguishes between three 'uses' of the terms 'masculinity' and 'femininity' – the psychological, the biological and the sociological. This debt to Freud is perhaps under-recognized in gender studies, which has tended to be hostile to psychoanalysis. Its importance is recognized in Connell (2002: 120) and Chanter (2006).
17. Stoller also calls this 'gender behaviour' (Stoller, 1968: x).
18. John Money and Anke A. Ehrhardt, in *Man and Woman, Boy and Girl* (1972: 4), reproduce Stoller's definitions of gender identity and gender role, but without any reflection on the category of gender itself. And it is very clear that for Money and Ehrhardt 'gender' is a normative, not a critical, category.
19. Of course, there are different conceptions of materialism at stake for each author here. Barrett's 'materialism' is effectively 'naturalism'; Delphy's is the practical materialism of Marx.

20. Moira Gatens's well-known 'A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction' was published in 1983. Jean Grimshaw's *Feminist Philosophers: Women's Perspectives on Philosophical Traditions* (1986), one of the first anglophone (and perhaps the first of the important British) books of feminist philosophy, contained a critique of the sex/gender distinction (pp. 128–133), largely based on the need for a critical reflection on the realm of the biological. On the other hand Carol Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* (1988: 225–6) rejects the idea of 'gender' to the extent that she associates this (as did Grimshaw (1986: 144), in part) with the ideal of a sex-neutral 'individual' as the basis of political thought; that is, largely because of a need for a critical reflection on the realm of civil society. Genevieve's Lloyd's *The Man of Reason: Male and Female in Western Philosophy* (1984) seems to have been written without notice of the sex/gender distinction (the word 'gender' and its cognates appear very infrequently, and as synonyms for 'sex'). Responding in 1993 (in the second edition) to the criticism that the sex/gender distinction was 'perversely blurred' in *The Man of Reason*, Lloyd argued that her object – 'the symbolic content of maleness and femaleness' – 'belongs properly neither with sex nor with gender' (1993: ix). But here Lloyd associates 'gender' only with 'socially produced masculinity and femininity' and 'gender identity'.
21. See, in particular, Braidotti (2002).
22. The research project, 'Transdisciplinarity and the Humanities: Problems, Methods, Histories, Concepts', began in 2011. For the project outline see: <http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/research/crmep/projects/transdisciplinarity/summary/>
23. See Osborne (2011b: 19–20).
24. Frédéric Darbellay (2005: 10) notes – without fully endorsing it – the coincidence of radical critiques of disciplinarity and the critique of the university ('its modes of construction and transmission of knowledge') in the 1960s in France, culminating in 1968. This history of the critique of institutional forms is most obviously connected to the history of the critique of disciplines in the case of philosophy.
25. For an argument concerning the transdisciplinary nature of the concept of sex, see Sandford (2011).
26. *Hypatia* began in 1982, 'piggy-backing' on *Women's Studies International Forum*.
27. More recently, Claire Hemmings (2011: 10) has made a similar point about the institutional life, in the UK, of what is now called 'gender studies', 'supported where it is harnessed to globalisation and seen as producing future gender mainstreaming or gender experts', her example being the London School of Economics, where she herself works. Looking back on her 1986 essay in 2010, Scott also noted the 'recuperation' of the word 'gender', for example in the official report on 1995 United Nations Fourth World Congress on Women (Beijing), where gender 'was an innocuous term, often simply a substitute for "women"' (Scott, 2010: 9). In an interview from 2004, reflecting on her critique of the sex/gender distinction, Gatens too identifies the tendency to equate 'gender' and 'women' (Gatens and Walsh, 2004: 214). Gatens seems unwilling to recognize *any* positive

- role, historically, for gender as an analytical or critical concept ('I thought the replacement of "sex" with "gender" was a bad move politically, a suspect move'). Gatens regrets the fact that the introduction of 'gender' left 'the body and corporeality out of the picture' (Gatens and Walsh, 2004: 213), but fails, absolutely, to acknowledge how the concept of gender was used strategically as a critique of the pre-feminist use of the concept of sex. And, after all, the pre-feminist concept of sex is still with us.
28. Of course other kinds of philosophy have flourished in all sorts of interdisciplinary spaces. In 'Out of Bounds: Philosophy in an Age of Transition', Rosi Braidotti and Judith Butler discuss precisely this – new philosophical practices and 'venues of thinking' (Butler and Braidotti, 2013: 307). But this is precisely 'philosophy outside its bounds', not philosophy in traditional philosophy departments. There are still plenty of people in plenty of traditional philosophy departments who would not recognize anything that Braidotti and Butler (or Deleuze or Derrida, etc.) do as 'philosophy'.
 29. In the same issue (Griffin et al., 2000), Elizabeth Ermath asked 'What Counts as Feminist Theory?' and answered without ever referring to philosophy, feminist or otherwise. Sara Ahmed objected to the idea that anyone should be counting, but still attempted a characterization of the diversity of feminist theory without, again, mentioning philosophy at all.
 30. Elizabeth Grosz (2009) criticizes the idea that feminist theory is a primarily critical discourse, in favour of a description of it as the practice of the creation of concepts. But her Deleuzian account of 'feminist theory', which she effectively equates with 'feminist philosophy', swallows the former up into the latter, and gives a partial view in which most of what constitutes the history of feminist theory does not in fact qualify as 'feminist theory' on Grosz's definition. (Neither does most of what makes up the history of feminist philosophy count as 'feminist philosophy'.) Grosz seems to allow feminist philosophy, in its disciplinary specificity, to define feminist theory, instead of seeing the theoretical dependence of feminist philosophy on the transdisciplinary and disciplinarily critical practice of feminist theory. Grosz's position also seems to exclude the possibility that critical discourses construct concepts; the example of Marx shows this not to be true.
 31. These reasons include the erosion of philosophy as critical discourse in favour of 'critical thinking', understood as the cultivation of 'transferable skills' for the job market, and the privileging of vocational subjects and science and technology disciplines, as part of an economic devaluation of the humanities in general. For feminist philosophy, especially, the main point may still be not to cede 'philosophy' to the enemy's 'self-sufficient' definition.

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