

Journal Writing: Example of A Combined Reflection on:

- Angela Davis, “Difficult Dialogues”
- Flax, “Women Do Theory”
- Lugones and Spelman, “Have I Got a Theory for You?”
- Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism vs. Post-structuralism”

Angela Davis in her conference speech asks of the audience, that we continue *to produce new forms of knowledge*. For her, this demand is necessary in order to advance and complicate our understanding of freedom, and our struggle in the real, material world. Her speech seems in some ways reflect a similar concern over the limits of women’s studies that last week’s readings pointed to—but she also maintains hope that women’s studies will be able to include these theoretical challenges. This differs from Brown’s piece from last week, who wants to call into question the very notion of knowledge production as inherently flawed, and capable of exclusion.

For Lugones and Spelman, feminism is situated in the demand for the voices of “women as women” that have long been silenced, to be heard. This demand is one that remains problematic for them in practice however, given the ease with which only privileged women have been able to achieve any progress in response to this demand. Thus they feel through this practice, and through feminist theory in general, non-white women have been silenced; defeating the implicit intentions of feminism in theory and practice. For them they hope to resolve the issue of “difference” which a category of “woman” fails to conceive of through dialogue and “friendship.” “Feminist theory is to be based on, the variety of real life stories women provide about themselves”; “instead, the theory has arisen out of the voices, the experiences, of a fairly small handful of women..(19)” That in looking at experience we can conceive of the meaning given, and that we give to our experience. To overcome the dichotomy between insider/outsider that is posed within theory, the writers suggest “only when genuine and reciprocal dialogue takes place between “outsiders” and “insiders” can we trust the outsider’s account.” (22) This will allow a more accurate portrayal of experience.

Although I agree with the need to contest theoretical “*givens*” that ignore or silence in their own categorical constructions, I also find fault in a political strategy whose ends is “illuminating the lives of people.” They write: “It is likely that both the method of investigation and the content of many accounts would be different if illuminating the lives of the people the accounts are about were the aim of the studies.” 23. That is Theory shouldn’t end at the articulation of experience, rather this is and was the starting point for feminist theory. It’s seem that what should instead be called into question are the workings that maintain these differences, how power maintains subordination of women, and between women. It’s not conceivable that we will ever be able to theorize something that is completely true- instead we can work and use experience as the means of locating what restricts us in our present, real, material struggles.

I agree more with Flax and Alcoff’s alternative—redefining the goal of feminist theory as one that is both situated within the material world (flax), but also able to respond to the complexities of power (Alcoff). Lugones and Spelman never actually spell out what it is that feminism is addressing- they only mention power and domination, but not from *whom or what*. I think this is how their suggestion for how to practice theory is lacking, because is there ever an end to accounts of experience? Isn’t this an ongoing process (like davis mentions) that can contribute to an articulation of that which we struggle against?

Alcoff draws from de Lauretis’s work to explore the “problem of conceptualizing woman as a subject.” Here she offers a theorized notion of experience to locate the problems in our own perceptions of reality, or subjects that are produced by ideology, and thus entangled within it. Woman is both fictional construct and real, historical being. The strength in this argument is that “she never loses sight of the political imperative of feminist theory, and thus, never forgets that we must seek not only to describe this relation in which women’s subjectivity is grounded but also to change it.” Goal is not to make “visible the invisible” as if gender, or essence of gender, were out there waiting to be recognized (as if gender was something true and real). We need to instead borrow from Lauretis; a “continuous engagement of self or subject in social reality.” But is this only isolated to individual, Alcoff writes that this doesn’t have to be relegated to academic practice, but how can we conceive of self-analyzing practice.