

**RE-READING AUDRE LORDE:
DECLARING THE ACTIVISM OF
BLACK FEMINIST THEORY**

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I dedicate this thesis to my daughters, Sophia, Misha and India

Abstract

Re-Reading Audre Lorde: Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory

Early in January 2013, whilst I was at home in the middle of the day writing this thesis, I was subjected to an armed burglary. The experience resonates with themes that preoccupy this re-reading of Audre Lorde, specifically with regards to: the timing, place and impact of 'epistemic violence' (Spivak, 1988:280) visited on Black feminisms; the theft of thinking; and the disregard for, and appropriation of, the temporal and spatial dimensions of historical and socio-economic contexts that constitute Black women's lives. Armed with weapons of authenticity, historical amnesia, hierarchies of oppression, the 'always already' (Althusser, 1971) and categories of identity designed to suppress Black feminism, the violations of Black women are unannounced and uninvited. My starting point is that '[t]he shadow obscuring this complex Black women's intellectual tradition is neither accidental nor benign' (Hill Collins, 2000:3). This thesis picks up on the idea of the impossibility of hospitality (Derrida, 2000) and the 'critic as host' (Hillis Miller, 1979) to frame a critical analysis of the occupation and location of Black feminist praxis. This thesis negotiates '...a channel between the "high theoretical" and the "suspicious of all theories"' (Boyce Davies, 1994:43).

The challenge of 'Re-Reading Audre Lorde: Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory' is to maintain a persistent, hypervigilant sensitivity towards the hostility of 'epistemic violence' (Spivak, 1988:280). I think it is possible to re-read Spivak's (1988) question, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in terms of, 'Can Black feminist theory speak?' The question of what is read and utilised and what is not, particularly when the 'what is not' refers to Black feminist scholarship in general, and to the work of Lorde in particular, is fundamental to this thesis.

This thesis produces new re-readings of Lorde's work that go beyond a literary textual analysis. The Kristevan idea of intertextuality as intersubjectivity (Kristeva, 1969:37) is used to show that the space and place between the words in 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' (Lorde, 1979a:60) function as the space and place between Black and white feminisms. The predicaments of positionality reiterated throughout this thesis mirror the predicaments within feminism. How can feminist theory present authoritative, metanarrative claims (and they need to be authoritative in the face of a racist, homophobic patriarchy that denies the legitimacy of Black women) whilst being implicated?

The quandary is that of how to establish and communicate any sense of a comprehensible, coherent re-reading of Lorde when each re-reading destabilises and contests any notion of an 'established.' The quandary takes on particular significance in relation to Black feminist political writings and communication of political imperatives. In other words, is there a possibility of 'the transformation of silence into language and action' (Lorde, 1977a:40) in the condition of the impossibility of language? Re-reading Lorde is both to occupy the margin and to

make use of the margin so that the impossible, the unavailable, and the fissures of re-reading Black feminist theoretical communications are the conditions of the activism of Black feminist theory.

Three principles of Black feminist methodology that underpin the work of this thesis include:

1. Lorde's Black feminist 'uses of the erotic' (Lorde, 1978a);
2. The dialogical and dialectical relationship between experience, practice and scholarship (Hill Collins, 2000:30);
3. That methodology is contingent upon, and constituted through, Black feminist activism. Throughout this thesis, I make a concerted effort to transfer the text of Black feminist critical theory from the page to the day-to-day struggles of Black feminist activism. For example, I demonstrate the relevance of Lorde in terms of constructing Black women-only reflective spaces and service provision, interventions to confront sexual violence against Black women and the '...psychological toll...' (The Combahee River Collective, 1977:266) of '...learn[ing] to lie down with the different parts of ourselves...' (Abod, 1987:158). This thesis is a work of re-membling; it is a deliberate transgression of fixed, theoretical and disciplinary borders, which reinvigorates the activism of theory.

Contents

Preface

| | |
|--|------|
| Foundations | i |
| The Launch of Trafford Rape Crisis Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women's Service | iii |
| The Convention | v |
| Who Count as Theorists? | vii |
| Reaching Out to ALL Women | viii |
| Launch Speech: 'Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory' | x |

Chapter 1. Introduction

| | |
|---|----|
| Re-Reading Audre Lorde | 3 |
| Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory | 6 |
| Audre Lorde: The Aporia of Positionality | 10 |
| Implicated | 13 |
| Black Feminist Methodology | 14 |
| Writing Genres | 19 |
| Politics of Pronouns: The Matter of Who Is Speaking | 22 |
| The Critic as Host | 25 |
| Historical Amnesia | 26 |
| Suspicion of Lorde, the Icon | 29 |
| Black Feminist Theory: The Function of Absence and Presence | 32 |
| Hybridity | 35 |
| Borderlands of the Dialectic | 37 |
| Black Feminist Author Function | 40 |
| Question of the Name | 43 |
| Summary of Chapters | 50 |

Chapter 2. 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface'

| | |
|--|-----|
| Introduction | 55 |
| Epistemology Is Flattened | 57 |
| Constitutive Contexts | 60 |
| Black Feminism without White Feminism? | 62 |
| Tolerance: The Grossest Reformism | 63 |
| The Yardstick of Fictive Universality | 65 |
| The 'not' | 71 |
| The Politics of Location | 73 |
| The Problem of the 'Native Informant' | 75 |
| The Constitutive Interstices of Feminisms | 78 |
| Intersectionality | 80 |
| Injurious Interpellations | 83 |
| The Performative Regime of Visibility | 87 |
| 'blackface' | 91 |
| Mimicry | 92 |
| Do the Manners of Black Feminists Need Reforming? | 95 |
| The Slippage of 'not' | 98 |
| Racist Social Structures Create Racist Psychic Structures | 101 |
| Fanon and Lorde | 102 |
| Resisting the Terms of Oppression | 108 |
| Re-Reading of the Re-Reading: The Indeterminacy of Reiteration | 109 |
| Black Women-Only Spaces and Services? | 110 |
| The Conversation | 111 |
| The First Lens: The Word 'feminism' | 121 |
| The Second Lens: The Word 'not' | 123 |
| The Third Lens: The Word 'in' | 127 |
| The Fourth Lens: The Word 'blackface' | 130 |
| Conclusion | 131 |

Chapter 3. An Analysis and Application of ‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power’

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introduction | 133 |
| The ‘Always Already’ | 134 |
| Tensions of the ‘Beyond’ | 138 |
| Constitutive ‘Uses of the Erotic’ | 140 |
| Critical Social Theory of ‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power’ | 143 |
| Precarious Positionality | 148 |
| Eros | 149 |
| ‘Uses of the Erotic’: Fear | 151 |
| ‘Uses of the Erotic’: Fear and Proximity | 154 |
| ‘Uses of the Erotic’: The Spatial Politics of Fear | 158 |
| ‘Uses of the Erotic’: Binaries | 162 |
| ‘Uses of the Erotic’ in Confronting Violence against Women | 167 |
| Objectify Myself: Objectify Her | 168 |
| Interconnections: Relations of Proximity | 170 |
| Lorde and Hill Collins’ Encounter | 172 |
| Productions of Distortion | 173 |
| The Totalizing Effect of Distortion | 177 |
| The Invitation | 179 |
| Disconnection and Connection | 183 |
| Moving from Generality to Specificity | 185 |
| Conclusion | 188 |

Chapter 4. The Aporetics of Intersectionality

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introduction | 191 |
| Intersectionality: An Experience of Aporia | 194 |
| The Aporia of Intersectionality as Method and Content | 197 |
| Inhabiting Intersectionality | 200 |
| The Psychological Toll of Intersectionality | 202 |
| Learning from the Combahee River Collective | 204 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Intersecting Encounters between Black Women | 208 |
| The Excess of Black Women | 210 |
| The Relation without Relation | 211 |
| Intersectionality: The Unavailable Solution | 213 |
| Intersectionality: A Theory about Borders | 215 |
| Intersectionality: The Impossibility of Hospitality | 220 |
| The ‘Pervertible or Perverting’ Law of the Hatch | 223 |
| Hostile Strangers: Black Women Go Around to the Back Door | 225 |
| The Inward Disturbance of Intersectionality | 227 |
| Intersectionality and the Foreigner | 229 |
| Pandora’s Box | 231 |
| Black Women: The ‘Absolute, Unknown, Anonymous Other’ | 233 |
| Conclusion | 236 |

Chapter 5. Zami: The Epilogue as ‘Myself Apart from Me’

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| Introduction | 241 |
| The Aporia of the Epilogue as Method | 242 |
| Mapping Out the Tensions | 246 |
| Transgressive Textual Practices | 252 |
| Another Meeting | 255 |
| Bearing Witness | 259 |
| The Problematic of Confrontation | 267 |
| Intertextuality | 269 |
| Print, Tattoo, Trace | 271 |
| The Origin of the Origin | 276 |
| ‘My Mother’s Mortar’ | 280 |
| Electrical Sparks of the Dialectic | 284 |
| Différance and Biomythography | 287 |

| | |
|----------------------|-----|
| Margins of the 'Law' | 294 |
| Conclusion | 300 |

Chapter 6. Conclusion

| | |
|---|-----|
| 'See <i>Too Much</i> ' | 303 |
| Resisting Attacks on Theory | 306 |
| Constrain Our Gaze | 311 |
| Problem 1: Paradox at the Heart of Feminism | 316 |
| Problem 2: There Is No Atom | 318 |
| Occupying the Space of the Concept | 323 |
| Where Is the Love? | 326 |

Appendix

330

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References

341

Preface

Foundations

Throughout the journey of undertaking this thesis, I have been engaged in setting up a new Rape Crisis Centre in Trafford, Manchester,¹ including the development of specific services for Black, Asian and Minority² Ethnic women. The issues, tensions and challenges explored in the thesis are the issues, tensions and challenges alive in developing a feminist support service for women survivors of sexual violence. These issues, tensions and challenges include representation, position, the construction of identity, intersecting vectors of oppressive categories of identity, and ‘the transformation of silence into language and action’ (Lorde, 1977a:40). We remain steadfast in our mission to form strategies of anti-racist, anti-homophobic, feminist resistance whilst dealing with:

...that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors’ tactics, the oppressors’ relationships.
(Lorde, 1980a:123)

¹ Trafford Rape Crisis services are provided by women for women within a feminist Collective structure. The services encompass two anonymous, confidential helplines open across six three-hour sessions per week, and an e-mail service that provides regular one-to-one e-mail support. Trafford Rape Crisis also provides two weekly drop-in sessions focussed on activities such as art, and the production of organic and essential oils-based soaps and self-care products. Trafford Rape Crisis has information developed in conjunction with, and accessible to, learning-disabled women, and is involved in campaigning and consciousness-raising. Trafford Rape Crisis has a critical feminist presence alongside statutory and mainstream service provision, including legal, health and social welfare systems (Trafford Rape Crisis, n.d.).

² I want to draw attention to problems with the term ‘minority’ and agree with Burman’s (2005) analysis: ‘We used the term “minoritization” (rather than “minority” or “minority ethnic group”) to highlight that groups and communities do not occupy the position of “minority” by virtue of some inherent property (of their culture or religion, for example), but rather they come to acquire this position as the outcome of a socio-historical and political process’ (Burman, 2005:533; parentheses in original).

Trafford Rape Crisis was launched in March, 2011, and the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women's Service was launched in March, 2012 during International Women's Week. The activism of Audre Lorde in particular, and the activism of Black feminist theory in general, continue to provide the foundation of our organisational structures, vision, mission and support services to all women survivors of sexual violence.³ More specifically, my personal work, thinking and engagement with Lorde and Black feminist theory in the journey of this thesis continue to be instrumental in my role as the Trafford Rape Crisis Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women's Service Development Worker. The ripple effects of actively engaging with Black feminist theory have enabled members of Trafford Rape Crisis to establish and sustain a dedicated Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women's Service.

The activism of Black feminist theory has had an impact on the profile of the membership of the Collective, the training provided for volunteers, and the discourse and practices used in our work. For example, the recruitment, training and support of volunteers that ran between December, 2011 and March, 2012 became founded on Black feminist theory. This has resulted in significant changes to the socio-economic profile of the membership of the Collective, which is now largely made up of Black, Asian and minority ethnic women. In turn, the significant changes in the demographic constitution of Trafford Rape Crisis are reconstituting the ideology, discourse, practices and vision of the organisation. For example, the Collective structure now includes a monthly Black women-only reflective space. Even though this space is not always comfortable or consistently

³ Chapter 2 of this thesis provides a direct example of how Lorde's work underpins the theory and practice of having a specific Black women's service, Black women's consciousness-raising training programme and reflective space.

well-attended, there is a shared sense that '[t]hese spaces are not only safe - they form prime locations for resisting objectification as the Other' (Hill Collins, 2000:101). This is primarily through a process articulated by hooks as an:

...ongoing, critical self-examination and reflection about feminist practice, about how we live in the world. This individual commitment, when coupled with engagement in collective discussion, provides a space for critical feedback which strengthens our efforts to change and make ourselves new. (hooks, 1989:24-25)

Sustaining feminist collective-working with '...no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals' (Lorde, 1980a:115) brings to life, and tests, the function of the erotic, explained by Lorde in the following way:

The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference. (Lorde, 1978a:56)

The Launch of Trafford Rape Crisis Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women's Service

The Trafford Rape Crisis Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women's Service was launched at an event that we named, 'Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory Convention' (Trafford Rape Crisis, 2012). Keynote speakers included

Sara Ahmed, Gargi Bhattacharyya, Carole Boyce Davies, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Sunera Thobani, Hannana Siddiqui from Southall Black Sisters (2013) and Dalia Farah from FORWARD (2002-2013). It should be acknowledged that Ann Phoenix, Gail Lewis and Kum Kum Bhavnani accepted the invitation to speak, but, due to mitigating personal circumstances, were not able to come on the day.

We were successful in obtaining funding for the event from Feminist Review (2013) and the Psychology of Women Section of the British Psychological Society (2000-2013). We argued our case for the necessity of the convention, with persistent determination and passion, to the Home Office department of the Ministry of Justice. When it looked hopeless and energies were low, we turned to Black feminist theory and the testimony of Black women's experiences of collective-working (The Combahee River Collective, 1977), and to Lorde. After much hard work and detailed documentation that interweaved Black feminist theory with Home Office government policy papers (Home Office, 2010; 2011), we managed to shift the position of the Ministry of Justice from one of not being able to see the relevance of the convention in terms of our service provision to a position whereby they agreed to a substantial financial contribution, effectively underwriting the convention.

Indeed, it could be said that the resistance we encountered from outside and inside of the Trafford Rape Crisis Collective forced us to articulate, and bring to life with increasing clarity and confidence, what the activism of Black feminist theory means to us. More specifically, we articulated, and brought to life, the intersection of 'activism' with 'Black feminist theory'; that is, 'activism' or 'action' that translates into concrete, tangible outputs that produce outcomes which make a measurable difference to women's lives. Thus, 'Black feminist

theory' is brought to life and articulated as the thinking upon which the action is contingent.

The work of Lorde has been instrumental in this process, and is evidence of the translation and relevance of her work to current feminist practice and experience. Through a detailed, critical re-reading of Lorde's work, this thesis is testimony to, and brings to life how and why, the application of Lorde's work continues to have a significant impact within contemporary feminist praxis. The development, launch and continued sustainability of Trafford Rape Crisis services are an example of the activism of Lorde.

The Convention

The two-day convention held in Trafford, Manchester, entitled, 'Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory Convention,' was used to share, and to articulate, the soil of thinking and vision in which Trafford Rape Crisis Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women's Service is rooted, nurtured and grown. The convention was a mechanism for demonstrating:

- The necessity for dedicated Black, Asian and minority ethnic women's services;
- That grassroots Black feminist service provision must be developed on a rigorous foundation of Black feminist theory;
- That service development must grow out of local, national and international consultation, collaboration, situated knowledge and experience;

- That the activism of Black feminist theory is alive, current and relevant to applied practice, the daily lives of people in communities and academic scholarship.

The key objectives of the convention were:

- Scrutiny of the mechanisms used in a racist, homophobic, patriarchal society to violate women;
- Examination of the intersectionality of Black feminist theory, activism and the experience of survivors;
- Examination of Black feminist ‘Theory as Liberatory Practice’ (hooks, 1994:59), picking up the potential of Black feminist scholarship to confront the violation of women;
- A direct challenge to the binaries of activism or theory, and experience or scholarship, the convention questions what counts as theory and who counts as theorist (Christian, 1987);
- To bring together key Black feminist thinkers alongside grassroots activists in order to form collective strategies of survival and bridges of resistance against multiple forms of violence against women.

We received the following comments about the convention:

Patricia Hill Collins: *‘I think that it is really important that you and your colleagues have decided to organize this conference. I applaud your initiative.’*

Chandra Talpade Mohanty: *‘I will be there in spirit, since I am sure you will generate some powerful energy at the meeting! In Solidarity, Chandra.’*

Kimberlé Crenshaw: *‘It is of course timely, essential and inspired.’*

Who Count as Theorists?

The question of how to ensure that the convention was fully inclusive of academic and non-academic Black women went to the heart of the purpose of the convention. It was a decisive intervention with the deliberate intention of troubling the power/knowledge relation, recognising that:

...the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality. (Foucault, 1981:52)

One of these procedures is to produce those who count as theorists and those who do not count as theorists.

The convention was about the activism of Black feminist theory in order to re-look at what these terms could mean. It provided an opportunity for Black women to undertake the task that Mohanty sets out:

...I am trying to uncover how ethnocentric universalism is produced in certain analyses. As a matter of fact, my argument holds for any discourse that sets up its own authorial subjects as the implicit referent, that is, the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural others. It is in this move that power is exercised in discourse. (Mohanty, 1984:21)

The convention placed emphasis on the ‘...links between Black feminism as a social justice project and Black feminist thought as its intellectual center’ (Hill Collins, 2000:xi). In a direct challenge to the binaries of activism or theory, and experience or scholarship, the convention engaged in a re-thinking of Black

Women's activism by interrogating the intersectionality of Black feminist theory and activism as lived experience.

Reaching Out to ALL Women

Too often, the method of reaching ALL women (if it is attempted or considered at all in relation to an academic convention) is to scale down or reduce the size, scope, intellectual content, discourse and language used reflecting all kinds of assumptions, stereotypes and forms of discriminatory attitudes and practices in relation to 'the other.'

Trafford Rape Crisis used different methods, including:

- Ensuring that the convention fee did not present a barrier to attendance via the introduction of a 'contribution' and 'free' places for those who were unable to pay the convention fee;
- Proactive outreach, both formal and informal, through Black Women's community networks, community centres, and targeting Black working-class, socio-economically marginalised living areas;
- Moving through, in and across spaces that Black Women use in their daily lives, including handing out conference flyers, and generating conversations and curiosity on market corners, streets, cafés, nurseries, libraries, post offices, corner shops, churches, temples, mosques, clinics, schools, colleges, sports centres, hairdressers and shopping centres. In addition, we engaged in door-to-door leafleting and put up posters in public spaces used by Black women;

- Using Facebook and other social networking sites;
- Community and regional radio, and local, regional and national newspapers and broadsheets;
- Hosting the convention in a Trafford-based, accessible, community venue with the provision of transport for specific community groups and individuals who would not have been able to attend without transport or travel expenses. For example, this enabled asylum-seekers and disabled people to attend.

The effectiveness of these strategies was reflected in the number and diversity of the delegates:

- Over 350 people attended the convention, including over half of the delegates from local communities, grassroots activist groups and survivors of sexual violence;
- 125 delegates reported that this was the first convention they had ever attended;
- 200 delegates identified themselves as Black, Asian or as a minoritised ethnic group;
- 270 delegates were women.

We continue to have enquiries about the convention and receive feedback about how the convention has been transformative in the lives of those who attended, and the ripple effects of this continue to be transformative within communities, amongst colleagues, family members and service provision. The

keynote speeches were captured on film, and a DVD is in production to enable the messages and impact of the convention to continue to ripple.

Launch Speech: ‘Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory’

My name is Surya Nayak and I work with Trafford Rape Crisis Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women’s Services, being launched here today.

My goodness, here we are, and a brave idea, a courageous vision, becomes a reality. We have our ‘Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory Convention.’ Kay, one of the volunteers at Trafford Rape Crisis, explained to me last week that the word ‘courage’ has in it ‘cor’ - the Latin word for heart - so that ‘courage’ comes to mean ‘inner strength from the heart.’ I stand here today, my heart pounding with pride and immense humility. I want to start by reading out to you part of the invitation we sent across the world to our speakers, here today, asking them if they would come. I read it to give you an idea of what we wanted to achieve.

This is what I wrote to them:

‘This convention idea has grown out of Black, Asian and minority ethnic women voicing their desire and need for mutual nourishment, inspiration and exchange of intelligence, support and challenge. We want to be able to talk about putting ideas in action; we want to seek the minds of others on really complex, uncomfortable issues we are grappling with. Wouldn’t it be wonderful, and a much needed tonic, to have a space filled with the ‘...“polyrhythms,” the polyvocality of Black women’s creative and critical speech’ (Boyce Davies, 1994:23), and the energy of

the activism of Black feminist theory? So, this convention is an expression of our courage to ask for what we want and what we believe we have a right to experience.

Positive replies to this invitation came back literally within hours and are testimony to the importance of this timely intervention. Indeed, even when barriers such as lack of funding confronted us, speakers who are here today from as far as the USA and Canada said they would still be prepared to come and fund themselves. As the barriers appeared one after another, and I was told in very kind and reasonable words that, perhaps, it was all rather ambitious, perhaps, too divisive, too 'Black,' too feminist and, perhaps, too academic, I became even more resolute, even more determined that it would and should happen. In my role as the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women's Service Development Worker, I was/am convinced that the service has to be underpinned by a rigorous foundation of thinking. I was/am convinced that the women we work with need and deserve the very best we can give. This convention is symbolic of how seriously and passionately we care about the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women and girl survivors of sexual violence.

I want to focus for a short while on the title of this event, 'Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory,' because the title captures key elements of the purpose, work and vision of Trafford Rape Crisis. 'Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory' is a rather long, complicated title, intertwining a number of elements that cannot be separated out from each other - just like the long, complicated journey each individual woman survivor of sexual violence travels.

Let's take the word 'declaring': if we go back to its roots, 'declaring' means 'to reveal, disclose and to make witness in public.' Indeed, the word 'declare' draws on the Latin word 'clarus' or 'to make clear, to clarify and to make bright,' invoking the spreading of sound and light. In her essay, 'The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action' (1977a), the writer and Black feminist activist, Audre Lorde, said, 'Your silence will not protect you' (Lorde, 1977a:41). The work of Trafford Rape Crisis bears witness to the fact that not only does silence fail to protect women, but it also serves to deny the existence of their experiences. Trafford Rape Crisis is about breaking silence - speaking out brightly to make the invisible visible so that the unrecognised is recognised. Audre Lorde goes on to explain how this works. She states:

But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences. (Lorde, 1977a:41)

Trafford Rape Crisis exists to make declaration about the causes and effects of violation against women; we declare to empower and empower to declare.

Let's focus on the other words of this title. The word 'activism' is inextricably bound up with the word 'theory,' and not just any theory, but the theory or thinking that comes from Black feminism; the often ignored, rich wealth of thinking, writing and declarations that come from the active intelligence, experience and history of Black, Asian and minority ethnic women. 'Active' because it comes out of life, is lived, is alive and is transformative. At Trafford Rape Crisis we take action; we proactively raise consciousness; we expose and

dismantle the ideas and the behaviours that legitimize rape and sexual violence. I truly believe that Trafford Rape Crisis is feminist theory in action. Our support work with women survivors of sexual violence is founded upon feminist thinking in order to liberate.

This convention seeks to trouble the distinction between those women who live theory, but, perhaps, do not identify themselves as theorists, and those women who theorise the lived experience and identify themselves as theorists. The convention seeks to create debate and share standpoints of theory (Hill Collins, 2000:252) in order to question what counts as theory and who counts as theorist. In other words, ALL Black, Asian and minority ethnic women are important thinkers; we are theorising all day, every day. The convention is about the activism of Black feminist theory in order to re-look at what these terms could mean.

The daily reality of living with the effects of racism and sexism, mixed up with other pressures such as poverty, disability and homophobia, is exhausting. The ways in which women are physically, emotionally and sexually violated, and survive these experiences, need to be understood in relation to racism and those other weights of oppression that press us down. Audre Lorde describes it in this way:

There is a constant drain of energy which might be better used in redefining ourselves and devising realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future. (Lorde, 1980a:115)

In other words, Black, Asian and minority ethnic women survivors of this racist, homophobic patriarchy have specific issues and needs which require

specific strategies, specific knowledge and specific forms of action as a foundation for altering the present and constructing futures that enable us to realise our potential.

This event marks an important milestone in Trafford in the provision of a specialist service for Black, Asian and minority ethnic women and girls who have experienced sexual violence, and the emotional and physical abuse that is so often part of this violation. This specialist service is open to all women and girls, whether their experience happened a long time ago, recently or is currently happening to them. What we do know is that sexual violence takes many forms; for example, forced marriage, rape, ritual abuse, pornography, female genital mutilation and sexual harassment. At Trafford Rape Crisis we work with all forms of sexual violence.

The formation and work of Trafford Rape Crisis began two years ago by a few committed, passionate and tireless women. Now, we have premises, helpline services, e-mail support services, information leaflets, undertake outreach and have close partnerships with voluntary, private and statutory services. We have carried out pioneering work with a group called, 'Change,' to create materials that are accessible for learning-disabled women, we have a Collective of over 40 trained volunteers, and the capacity to deliver training and raise awareness about the emotional, psychological and practical needs of women and girl survivors of sexual violence. Today, we are launching a dedicated service for Black, Asian and minority ethnic women, including a specific helpline and e-mail support.

The formation of Trafford Rape Crisis is testimony to the power of women coming together to make something happen for the liberation of other women and

girls. It is truly inspirational. We are a Collective of the most diverse group of women you can imagine in terms of age, race, class, sexuality, skills and knowledge. We are ambitious, strong, resourceful, visionary and resolute. Into this mix, we are first and foremost woman-centred; this is a service by women for women. It is a service that women and girls can use, confident that they will be believed, they will be heard and they will be supported through their particular journey.

At Trafford Rape Crisis we use the speech act (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969, 1975) - the activism of speaking out as a tool of feminism to spread sound and light on our thinking about the ways in which racism is inextricably linked to the violation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic women. At Trafford Rape Crisis we understand something of what the feminist writer, Judith Butler, meant when she said:

What does it mean for a word not only to name, but also in some sense to perform and, in particular, to perform what it names? (Butler, 1997a:214)

We use the speech act to re-position, to re-locate and re-orientate blame, shame and responsibility away from the woman survivor of sexual violence. At the heart of what we do on the helpline, in our outreach work, training and campaigning is breaking silence - speaking out and enabling women and girls to say the unsayable, and give voice about what has happened to them.

These are the kinds of things we hear as we support women and undertake outreach work: 'I cannot say the words'; 'I have never told anyone'; 'if I talked, no one would believe me'; 'to talk about it would bring shame on my family'; 'to

put into words, to say the words, would make it real - it would mean that it really happened.’

We can see from these examples that silence is used as a powerful tool in sexual violence. Silence operates on an individual, family, community, societal and global level. Silence is a powerful and clever tool for a number of reasons:

Silence regulates and controls;

Silence shifts the shame and blame from the abuser to the abused;

Silence isolates;

Silence legitimises the sexual violence;

Silence means that sexual violence is not talked about openly, it becomes taboo;

Silence drives the violation of women and girls underground, behind closed doors;

Silence - that which is unsayable, which cannot be given voice to, that which is prohibited from speech - masks the prevalence and the effects of rape and sexual abuse;

Silence about sexual violence causes and exacerbates mental distress and emotional turmoil, resulting in numerous mental health difficulties;

Silence prevents women and girls living in Trafford from feeling safe, confident and secure. In other words, silence about sexual violence has an impact on all areas of life;

Silence robs women and girls of the transformational effect of speaking out. Breaking silence is core to the recovery process;

Silence robs women and girls from collective action and awareness. We could say that silence operates a kind of ‘divide and rule’ because it separates, fragments and isolates instead of allowing the strength of multiple voices to sound out loud and clear - to make a noise that can no longer be ignored;

Silence about sexual violence is not good for all members of all communities who live within Trafford. It is not good for all members of all communities living across the world, whether they be men, women or children.

Rape Crisis centres throughout the country (Rape Crisis [England and Wales], 2004-2013), and Trafford Rape Crisis in particular, are founded on breaking silence; it is all about giving voice.

Our knowledge and understanding about the power of giving voice has a history in the women’s liberation movement that goes back to the idea of ‘speaking out.’ On a Sunday afternoon in January, 1971 in America, over 30 women gave public testimony to their experiences of the abuse of power through sexual violence. This was called a ‘speak out event’ and was the first of its kind (Brownmiller, 1999:199-200). Following in the tradition of this inspiring event in

1971, today, in March, 2012, we are going to enact our own ‘speak out’ and I invite our women to speak.⁴

I declare the activism of ‘Trafford Rape Crisis Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women’s Service.’

⁴ At this part of the speech, with the invitation to speak out, six different members of Trafford Rape Crisis, who were sitting throughout the audience, stood up one by one and performed a ‘speak out event,’ reading the testimonies of women survivors of sexual violence.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Why is it that Foucault is read and used more than Lorde? Is it because Foucault is more articulate, erudite and intellectually superior than Lorde? Is it because Foucault is more relevant? Not that it has much to do with the answer to these questions, but consideration of the context and content of their writings makes these questions even more intriguing. Foucault (1926 - 1984) and Lorde (1934 - 1992) both wrote some of their key works during the same historical period (1970s and 1980s). Both Lorde and Foucault were concerned with similar issues, such as the production of, and relation between, power, knowledge, subjectivity and position. Both Lorde and Foucault would question why a particular theory is more popular than another, and why a particular text, author and/or voice is known and used more than another. Yet, the fact remains that Foucault enjoys a more prominent, legitimised position in academic scholarship than Lorde. Indeed, the name 'Foucault' is so well-embedded in Western scholarship that it gets picked up and can be instantly corrected by Microsoft spell-check technology.

The reasons why Foucault and, indeed, numerous other intellectuals that could be named are read and used more than Lorde, and indeed, numerous other Black feminist intellectuals that could be named, have nothing to do with relevance or intellectual superiority. To focus on these qualitative yardsticks is a diversion from the crux of the matter.

The question of who is read and used, and who is not, particularly when the ‘who is not’ refers to Black feminist scholarship in general, and to the work of Lorde in particular, is fundamental to this thesis. Spivak focusses on the crux of the matter in relation to who is read, used and heard in her question, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (Spivak, 1988). Spivak opens this seminal work with the following statement:

An understanding of contemporary relations of power, and of the Western intellectual’s role within them, requires an examination of the intersection of a theory of representation and the political economy of global capitalism. A theory of representation points, on the one hand, to the domain of ideology, meaning, and subjectivity, and, on the other hand, to the domain of politics, the state, and the law. (Spivak, 1988:271)

Lorde’s work and, consequentially, this thesis, are an engagement with ‘...the intersection of a theory of representation and the political economy of global capitalism.’ My starting point is that ‘[t]he shadow obscuring this complex Black women’s intellectual tradition is neither accidental nor benign’ (Hill Collins, 2000:3). The project of the thesis is to critically examine this position of suppression.

This thesis demonstrates unequivocally that Lorde’s work goes beyond the ‘...*strategic* use of positivist essentialism...’ (Spivak, 2006:281; emphasis in original) and has relevance to legitimately intervene in, and shape the direction of, contemporary feminist debates. Indeed, not to do so is both a loss and to be complicit with Western hegemony in maintaining unequal relations of power. It demonstrates the ways in which Lorde, in conjunction with Black feminist

scholarship, creates a critical lens not only to examine key concepts, issues and questions, but, also, to provide a body of theory relevant for applied disciplines such as psychology,⁵ social work, psychoanalysis, social theory, critical race theory and feminism.

This thesis produces new re-readings of Lorde's work that go beyond a literary textual analysis, but, inspired by Bhabha's (1986) 'Remembering Fanon...', Gates, Jr.'s (1988) *The Signifying Monkey...* and Seshadri-Crooks' (2000a) *Desiring Whiteness...*, this thesis interrogates Lorde's location in the performative '...spatial margin, that is, the margin as subject position...' (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000b:8).

Re-Reading Audre Lorde

“Good” literary criticism, the only worthwhile kind, implies an act, a literary signature or counter-signature, an inventive experience of language, *in* language, an inscription of the act of reading in the field of the text that is read. (Derrida, 1992a:52; emphasis in original)

The act of re-reading Lorde is an inventive experience because each re-reading is different. No re-reading is the same and, as such, each re-reading is a new re-reading. The predicament is that of how to establish and communicate any sense

⁵ As demonstrated in the Appendix of this thesis, which provides the monograph proposal contracted for the Routledge 'Concepts for Critical Psychology' Series, entitled, 'Why Critical Psychologists Must Read Audre Lorde: Race, Gender and Social Change,' due for submission in May, 2013.

of a comprehensible, coherent re-reading of Lorde when each re-reading destabilises any notion of an ‘established,’ and in doing so, contests any notion of an ‘established.’ The predicament takes on a particular significance in relation to Black feminist political writings and communication of messages designed to create coalitions of resistance to oppression. In other words, the questions become: how can the impossibility of a unified, established communication work to form the possibility of a unified, established, political feminist resistance? How can the call to feminist collective action that is reiterated throughout Lorde’s text be possible when reiteration produces inevitable fissures? Is there a possibility of ‘the transformation of silence into language and action’ (Lorde, 1977a:40) in the condition of the impossibility of language?

The gap between the iterated and the reiterated in the term ‘re-reading,’ represented by the hyphen, is a preoccupation of the thesis investigated through intertextual (re-)readings of Lorde. The ramifications of this preoccupation are illustrated in Chapter 2 through close re-readings of ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ (Lorde, 1979a:60). The chapter draws on the Kristevan idea of intertextuality as intersubjectivity (Kristeva, 1969) as a method to deconstruct the intersubjective interdependence of words. To be more specific, Chapter 2 argues that the space and place between the words in Lorde’s statement that ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ function as the space and place between Black and white feminisms.

In contesting any notion of an established, unified singularity, the space and place between the iterated and the reiterated contest an established, unified singularity of author intention. Derrida explains that:

What holds for the receiver holds also, for the same reasons, for the sender or the producer. To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a sort of machine which is productive in turn, and which my future disappearance will not, in principle, hinder in its functioning, offering things and itself to be read and to be rewritten. When I say “my future disappearance” [*disparition*: also, demise, *trans.*], it is in order to render this proposition more immediately acceptable. I ought to be able to say my disappearance, pure and simple, my nonpresence in general, for instance the nonpresence of my intention of saying something meaningful [*mon vouloir-dire, mon intention-de-signification*], of my wish to communicate, from the emission or production of the mark. For a writing to be a writing it must continue to “act” and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed... (Derrida, 1972a:8; parentheses and italics in original)

The dialectic here is that Lorde’s ‘nonpresence’ to herself renders her ‘mark’ (written and verbal enunciations) and her intention in the ‘mark’ impossible to ascertain, but, and here is the bone of contention, the act of writing and (re-) reading relies on some kind of recognition of the ‘mark.’ Derrida summarises the dialectic as:

What is re-markable about the mark includes the margin within the mark. The line delineating the margin can therefore never be determined rigorously, it is never pure and simple. The mark is re-markable in that it “is” also its margin. (Derrida, 1977a:70)

The predicament of the margin, border and boundary is pursued throughout each chapter of the thesis. I propose that critical analysis of the aporia of margins provokes a critical re-working of the politics of being on the margins, marginalised and marginality. Re-reading Lorde through a re-reading of Derrida, I propose a re-working of ‘...we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals’ (Lorde, 1980a:115). Here, re-readings, in which intertextuality and intersubjectivity are in a relation of infinite and mutual referral and deferral, contest the existence of established, stable patterns.

Re-reading Lorde is both to occupy the margin and to make use of the margin so that the impossible, the unavailable and the fissures of re-reading Black feminist theoretical communications are the conditions of the activism of Black feminist theory. From this perspective, energy can be directed away from establishing a correct (re-)reading or fixing of the intention of political texts - a source of so many divisions, exclusions and replication of hierarchical positions that have haunted, and continue to haunt, feminism. Rather, energy should be re-directed towards the situation and experience of instability as a site of Black feminist subversion. Spivak explains that ‘...the absence of sender and receiver is the *positive* condition of possibility of “communication,”’ (Spivak, 1980:80; emphasis in original) and I argue that effective feminist resistance to oppression depends on effective communication.

Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory

Lorde had trouble speaking:

Even one intelligible word was a very rare event for me. And although the doctors at the clinic had clipped the little membrane under my tongue so I

was no longer tongue-tied, and had assured my mother that I was not retarded, she still had her terrors and her doubts. She was genuinely happy for any possible alternative to what she was afraid might be a dumb child. (Lorde, 1996:14)

My mother had a special and secret relationship with words, taken for granted as language because it was always there. I did not speak until I was four. (Lorde, 1996:21)

I was very inarticulate as a youngster. I couldn't speak. I didn't speak until I was five, in fact, not really, until I started reading and writing poetry. I used to speak in poetry. I would read poems, and I would memorize them. People would say, well what do you think, Audre. What happened to you yesterday? And I would recite a poem... (Evans, 1979:71)

These excerpts bring together a range of issues concerned with the act of speaking that are relevant to the act of declaring or speaking out about the activism of Black feminist theory. A close re-reading of Lorde's words here indicates: speech as a marker of what it is to be a legitimate, intelligent human being; speech as 'taken for granted' and 'always there' whilst holding the quality of the 'secret'; and the relationship between speech, writing, conventions of speech and the unconventional chaos of poetry. Austin maintained that:

Once we realize that what we have to study is *not* the sentence but the issuing of an utterance in a speech-situation, there can hardly be any longer a possibility of not seeing that stating is performing an act. (Austin, 1975:139; emphasis in original)

The act being performed is the creation of a social and psychic reality within a social context.

The performative declarative in the title of this thesis, 'Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory,' could be thought of as a perlocutionary act. Both the act of declaration and the 'act'-ivism within the circumstance of Black feminist theory function within the act of 'Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory' to bring about an impact on the audience. This framing draws on the theory of the speech act (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969, 1975) developed by Butler into the feminist theory of performativity. Butler explains that '[w]ithin speech act theory, a performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names' (Butler, 1993a:13). The implications of this for the 'excitable speech' (Butler, 1997b) of the activism of Black feminist theory include the following factors:

1. The situation of Black women, in every sense of the word, is not a product of nature, but a product of discursive practice;
2. Discursive practices are unstable social, historical, cultural, economic and political artefacts (Burr, 1995:3-5);
3. Performativity is not a one-off act, but works through repetitive re-inscriptions (Butler, 1999:xv);
4. The contingent instability of the contextualised artefact, the production of communication and the inevitable space represented in the hyphen in the term 're-inscription' are opportunities for subversion;
5. The opportunities in the space between each enactment of the declaration of the activism of Black feminist theory are a chance for the insurrection

of the laws of discursive practice (especially when those practices subjugate Black women).

The challenge of the title performed through this thesis is summarised in Derrida's caution that '...there is no "pure" performative' (Derrida, 1972a:17), coupled with Spivak's question, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (Spivak, 1988). The challenge of performing 'Re-Reading Audre Lorde: Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory' is that of maintaining a persistent, hypervigilant sensitivity towards 'epistemic violence' (Spivak, 1988:280).

I think it is possible to re-read the question, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in terms of, 'Can Black feminist theory speak?' The dilemma of the question is that if the reply is 'yes, the Subaltern/Black feminist theory can speak,' then the questions become: what code, language and condition is this contingent upon? What discursive practices permit the reply of 'yes'? Who/what confers this agency of speaking? On the other hand, if the reply is 'no, the Subaltern/ Black feminist theory cannot speak,' then the questions become: what code, language and condition is silence contingent upon? What discursive practices permit the reply of 'no'? Who/what forecloses this agency of speaking? Add to this Derrida's deconstruction of logocentrism, in which both the subject and the word of the subject are decentered, and the notion of a subaltern who can speak their situation, or a Black feminist theory that can speak the situation of Black women, is decentered.

Indeed, I propose that the project of 'Re-Reading Audre Lorde: Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory' can enable a nuanced re-working of reductionist centre/margin perspectives. The 're-markable' (Derrida, 1977a:70)

Lorde as the margin and the decentring of logos as utterance, text, author and declarer of Black feminist theory productively messes with neat centre/margin configurations of ‘master territories’ (Minh-ha, 1991). The relationship between speaking, knowledge and work is articulated by Ahmed in the following way: ‘...considering the epistemic dimensions of speaking will demonstrate the links between representation and broader relationships of production...’ (Ahmed, 2000:61). Thus, ‘...“who speaks?”...,’ ‘...“who hears?”’ and ‘...“who is knowing, here?”’ (Ahmed, 2000:61) constitute questions that are fundamental to the production of, and productions within, this thesis. Furthermore, these questions also constitute a critical lens of self-reflection that provokes me to ask: ‘who is speaking in this thesis?’ and ‘...*how does the act of speaking already know “the stranger” as within or without a given community?*’ (Ahmed, 2000:61; italics in original) With regards to methodology, here I interpret ‘given community’ to be this ‘given’ thesis.

Audre Lorde: The Aporia of Positionality

In the following excerpts from *Zami* (1996), Lorde takes up the conundrum of location, space and margins as she tries to negotiate a subject position:

I did not like the tail of the Y hanging down below the line in Audrey, and would always forget to put it on...We were given special short wide notebooks to write in, with very widely spaced lines on yellow paper. They looked like my sister’s music notebooks. We were also given thick black crayons to write with...I knew quite well that crayons were not what

you wrote with, and music books were definitely not what you wrote in. I raised my hand. When the teacher asked me what I wanted, I asked for some regular paper to write on and a pencil. That was my undoing. “We don’t have any pencils here,” I was told. (Lorde, 1996:14-15)

I bent my head down close to the desk that smelled like old spittle and rubber erasers, and on that ridiculous yellow paper with those laughably wide spaces I printed my best AUDRE. I had never been too good at keeping between straight lines no matter what their width, so it slanted down across the page something like this:

A
U
D
R
E

The notebooks were short and there was no more room for anything else on that page. So I turned the page and went over, and wrote again, earnestly and laboriously, biting my lip,

L
O
R
D
E...

(Lorde, 1996:15)

These excerpts show that from as early as the age of four years old, Lorde was engaged in:

The question as to when one should “mark” oneself (in terms of ethnicity, age, class, gender, or sexuality for example) and when one should adamantly refuse such markings... For answers to this query remain bound to the specific location, context, circumstance, and history of the subject at a given moment. Here, positionings are radically transitional and mobile. (Minh-ha, 2011:51; parentheses in original)

This thesis traces the ways in which Lorde takes up Min-ha’s question of when to ‘mark’ oneself and when to ‘refuse such markings.’

Although positionings are mobile, the point that is demonstrated time and time again throughout this thesis is that mobility does not provide an escape or relief from the aporia of positionality. Lorde’s position of being outside the lines of demarcation on the ‘...very widely spaced lines on yellow paper’ remains a position in itself, and that position is defined in relation to, and constituted by, the specific location, context and circumstance of ‘...that ridiculous yellow paper with those laughably wide spaces...’ and the ‘...thick black crayons to write with.’ Thus, this thesis provides a critical analysis of the claims of position, movement and undoing of position in the metanarrative of Lorde’s work, and in doing so, it examines these same claims in the metanarrative of feminist theory.

Implicated

Caselli dismantles the inevitable tension in the following way:

The metanarrative assertion, however, also presents itself as an authoritative claim, as if it could escape the very game of which it is part and could guarantee the reality or unreality of what is written. Although there is no ground to decide what is artificial, since the claim belongs to the same fictional world that it denounces, the rhetoric creates the illusion that, by judging what the narrator has just said, it stands on a higher ground. The metanarrative statement occupies an ambiguous position, as it is implicated in the narrative it criticises and it also stands above it in order to judge it. (Caselli, 2005:105)

In the task of ‘judging’ patriarchy, and in the questioning of ‘artificial’ fictions of what a woman is, the question becomes: how can the metanarrative of feminism present authoritative claims (and they need to be authoritative in the face of women’s denied authority, and in particular, in the face of a racist, homophobic patriarchy that denies the authority of Black women) whilst being part of the ‘game’?

In terms of race, the question for critical race theory, Black feminist theory, post-colonial theory and for Lorde is:

...how can the black subject posit a full and sufficient self in a language in which blackness is a sign of absence? (Gates, 1986:218)

Gates’ query is particularly relevant for two reasons: firstly, because it can be applied both to race and gender, and the application takes on increased

significance in terms of the intersectionality of race, gender and other categories of identity that are constituted as a sign of absence; and secondly, because the problem he articulates establishes that the notion of ‘absence’ in itself does not provide an escape from the aporia of positionality. Thus, Gates enables a more nuanced understanding of the aporia of positionality, where neither mobility nor absence provides an escape.

More specifically, the question within this thesis is: how does Lorde grapple with this ambiguous, implicated position? Indeed, the process of writing this thesis has been a question of, and a questioning of, my own grappling with this tension in terms of how I position Lorde and am (re-)positioned by Lorde. I am beginning to understand something of what Spivak wrote in the first paragraph of ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’: ‘...although I will attempt to foreground the precariousness of my position throughout, I know such gestures can never suffice’ (Spivak, 1988:271).

Black Feminist Methodology

This thesis is a gesture of working with Lorde, and it is a gesture of putting Lorde to work. Drawing on scholarship including, for example, postcolonial, literary, Black feminist and deconstructionist theory, this multidisciplinary, pedagogical intervention juxtaposes a range of standpoints and theoretical approaches. In terms of methodology, this thesis is an intersection of ‘...interlocking and mutually reinforcing...’ (Nash, 2008:3), constitutive approaches. This thesis provides a new critical, close re-reading of Lorde produced out of her ‘...specific location, context, circumstance, and history...’ (Min-ha, 2011:51). The

methodology juxtaposes those given moments of production with the given moments of current feminist debates. An objective of this methodology is to transgress boundaries across a temporal and spatial spectrum. Furthermore, ‘...the specific location, context, circumstance, and history of the subject at a given moment’ (Min-ha, 2011:51) applies both to author and reader to produce particular and shifting re-readings at any given time, space and place. Indeed, this thesis demonstrates that Lorde performs what Min-ha (2011) calls ‘the boundary event’ and, in doing so, Lorde enables us to think about, and to narrate, the happenings of the boundary.

This thesis adopts the concept of ‘the boundary event’ as a methodology and, furthermore, the thesis itself performs a theoretical ‘boundary event.’ It is an example of content and method intersecting. Time and time again throughout this thesis, the subject under analysis and the method to investigate the subject under analysis are mutually constitutive. Indeed, I would argue that the intersection of method, analysis and content is a consistent structure that constitutes the main body of this thesis. Because ‘...the space and place we inhabit produce us’ (Probyn, 2003:294), the space and place of this thesis has produced its methodology. For example, the space and place of aporia, the dialectic, intersectionality and the matrix of domination simultaneously constitute the subject under analysis and the methodology for analysis.

It is no coincidence that this method has evolved as an organic process through the journey and content of this thesis, given that:

Black feminist politics by its very nature exists right at the intersection of several issues that are located in Black women’s experiences. And since

experience is also ideologically produced, and Black women's experience is what Black women's writing purports to express, we are also simultaneously examining ideological, discursive positions of some Black women who are writers. (Boyce Davies, 1994:30)

The methodology arising from the experience of undertaking this thesis is contingent upon, and constituted by, a number of intersecting factors that include:

1. The fact that:

Black feminist criticisms, then, perhaps more than many of the other feminisms, can be a praxis where the theoretical positions and the criticism interact with the lived experience. (Boyce Davies, 1994:55)

It is the interaction of theory with lived experience that creates the methodology of Black feminist criticism. More specifically, a core aspect of the project of this thesis is to expose, reclaim and assert the theoretical position of Lorde's work - a task that includes the dialectic of examining the suppression of that position, whilst contesting that suppression. Hill Collins explains that:

This dialectic of oppression and activism, the tension between the suppression of African-American women's ideas and our intellectual activism in the face of that suppression, constitutes the politics of U.S. Black feminist thought. More important, understanding this dialectical relationship is critical in assessing how U.S. Black feminist thought - its core themes, epistemological significance, and connections to domestic and transnational Black

feminist practice - is fundamentally embedded in a political context that has challenged its very right to exist. (Hill Collins, 2000:3-4)

2. Christian states:

...I think we need to read the works of our writers in our various ways and remain open to the intricacies of the intersection of language, class, race, and gender in the literature. (Christian, 1987:13)

For me, being ‘...open to the intricacies of the intersection...’ is a methodology and produces a methodology. Lorde identifies being ‘open’ as a use of the erotic, ‘...whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea’ (Lorde, 1978a:56-57). In being ‘open’ to examining the ideas of Black feminist literature, I realise, and ‘...“[i]t feels right to me”...’ (Lorde, 1978a:56), that Lorde’s Black feminist ‘uses of the erotic’ are a methodology. In other words:

Beyond the superficial, the considered phrase, “It feels right to me,” acknowledges the strength of the erotic into a true knowledge, for what that means is the first and most powerful guiding light toward any understanding. (Lorde, 1978a:56)

I believe that:

...the suppression of Black women’s intellectual traditions has made this process of feeling one’s way an unavoidable epistemological stance for Black women intellectuals. (Hill Collins, 2000:19)

I propose that consideration of, ‘It feels right to me,’ provides a methodology for negotiating ‘...a channel between the “high theoretical” and the “suspicious of all theories”’ (Boyce Davies, 1994:43). The method of opening the ‘high theoretical’ to the intricacies and suppression of Black women’s experience, work and voice keeps suspicion alive, whilst not allowing suspicion to destroy that which is useful theoretically.

3. The methodology is contingent upon, and constituted through, the grassroots feminist work that is central to my living; for example, working in Manchester, Oxford and Trafford Rape Crisis centres, engagement with asylum-seekers and refugee women, and numerous community-based education projects. Lorde’s own involvement in grassroots feminist activism included the creation of ‘Sisters in Support of Sisters in South Africa’ (SISA) (Kraft, 1986:152) under apartheid, and the founding of the ‘Kitchen Table Press’ with Barbara Smith in the late 1980s (Cavin, 1983:106). The dialogical relationship between experience, practice and scholarship produces the methodology of the activism of Black feminist theory, where the *how to do*, and the *doing of*, the project, intersect. Boyce Davies makes the point that:

Scholarship and theoretical writing by Black women, because they exist in an academic context, have become distant and removed from the day-to-day lives of most people. But it is not only the fact of the critic distantly removed from the people which is the issue, but the ways in which Black women as writers, academics, teachers, who live lives of multiple oppression, still end up

paradoxically unintelligible to those who are unschooled in critical discourses and also to those who are. (Boyce Davies, 1994:36)

Throughout this thesis, I make a concerted effort to transfer the text of Black feminist critical theory from the page to the day-to-day struggles of Black feminist activism. I agree with Boyce Davies (1994:36) that ‘Black feminist critics have to make a concerted effort...to do community work whenever/wherever possible.’ For example, in Chapter 3, Lorde’s (1978a) ‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power’ is used as a framework in the theory and intervention to confront sexual violence against Black women. In Chapter 2, Lorde’s statement that ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ (Lorde, 1979a:60) is used to examine the necessity of Black women-only reflective spaces and specific Black women-only service provision. In Chapter 4, ‘The Aporetics of Intersectionality’ form a basis to analyse the emotional impact of ‘...integrat[ing] all the parts of who I am...’ (Lorde, 1980a:120). Examination of the ‘...psychological toll...’ (The Combahee River Collective, 1977:266) of embodied intersectionality is applied to the struggles encountered in collective-working, Black women-only spaces and the experience of engaging with Black feminist texts.

Writing Genres

The stylistic construction of this thesis reflects something of the intersection of content and methodology adopted to tease out the relevant issues and application of those issues. From different uses of writing genres to the detail of the use of pronouns, the thesis mirrors the instability and shifting nature of Lorde’s literary

and rhetorical devices. In this sense, the concept of exceeding the bounds of the text (Barthes, 1967, 1971; Foucault, 1969) becomes:

1. A method of critical textual analysis;
2. A force that shapes the style and structure of the text of this thesis;
3. The subject under analysis, in terms of tracking the ways that Lorde's text draws on traditions of the Black vernacular (Gates, Jr., 1988) and the highly political patterns of Black feminist literary constructions.

Lorde's oeuvre comprises a prolific and diverse range of published and unpublished works of fiction and non-fictional pieces. Although this thesis does not stretch to include the poems of Lorde, it does draw on her speeches, letters, essays, personal journal entries, feminist journal articles, interviews, pamphlets, conference papers and biomythography.

The focus on Lorde's political speeches, essays and interviews reflect my own, personal, evolving relationship with her work. Whilst I have a deepening appreciation of Lorde's poems, it was her political essays and speeches - particularly those in *Sister Outsider* - that provided an anchor for me at an especially testing time in my journey of personal, political activism and transformation. Here, I am reminded of Lorde's own reflection:

I wrote "The Uses of the Erotic" a little while, maybe a month before I had my mastectomy. And when I surfaced from that experience, about six months later, I picked up - when I started looking at my work again - I picked up that piece, and it was...exactly what I needed to read. It was what I needed to say to myself... (Abod, 1987:161)

If I were to begin the journey of this thesis again, I would include her poetry, but I say this as a different Surya now than the Surya who embarked on the task of the thesis five years ago. The importance of this reflection is bound up with preoccupation in the thesis of positionality, the shifting nature of subjectivity, and the function of author and text.

Lorde's spectrum of writing genres is reflected in the spectrum of writing genres that comprises this thesis. For example, the 'Preface' includes the speech I wrote and delivered to open the 'Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory Convention.' Chapter 4, 'The Aporetics of Intersectionality,' is a personal, reflective piece written in the first person, and Chapter 2 presents an analysis of 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' (Lorde, 1979a:60) through two different styles. These two styles include a piece of formal, academic prose, and the construction of an experimental, pedagogical intervention in the form of an imaginary conversation between me, Lorde and a range of other Black and white feminist critics. Rather than talking *about* Lorde, this particular intervention produces the effect of talking *with* Lorde. Drawing on a literary tradition of dialogue, conversation, interviews and plays, this conversation between activists and scholars across a temporal and spatial spectrum juxtaposes a range of visions, standpoints and theoretical approaches. It is a deliberate transgression of fixed, theoretical and disciplinary borders that resists '...historical amnesia...' (Lorde, 1980a:117). The imaginary conversation that structures part of Chapter 2 creates a forum to work with, and to explore, concepts such as the speech act and speaking position that are at the heart of the subject under discussion. Furthermore, it represents a performance of intertextuality in

action. More specifically, it is a polyvocal performative representation of intertextuality as intersubjectivity (Kristeva, 1969).

Politics of Pronouns: The Matter of Who Is Speaking

‘In fact, however, all discourses endowed with the author function do possess this plurality of self’ (Foucault, 1969:112). This plurality arises because the pronoun ‘I’ of the author ‘...refers to an individual without an equivalent who, in a determined place and time, completed a certain task...’ (Foucault, 1969:112). In other words, Lorde as author was never available either to us or to herself. This is not just because she is physically dead; equivalence is disrupted because ‘[t]he knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole...’ (Haraway, 1988:288). In turn, the intentions of Lorde as author are never available even when the author ‘...speaks to tell the work’s meaning, the obstacles encountered, the results obtained, and the remaining problems...’ (Foucault, 1969:112).

Furthermore, the self/selves of a pronoun, whether in the form of author or reader, is/are always ‘...situated in the field of already existing or yet-to-appear...’ (Foucault, 1969:112). This is demonstrated in the methodology and content of ‘my’ thesis, where the construction of ‘my’ is through a re-reading, application and citation of multiple authors ‘...without an equivalent who, in a determined place and time, completed a certain task...’ (Foucault, 1969:112). In other words, the author of this thesis is as unavailable as the authors within the thesis. This dynamic takes on particular significance when the ‘without an equivalent’ is manufactured into a totalizing equivalent, as is the case with Black feminist critics. Foucault’s point is that the determined place and time function to produce the

situation of ‘without an equivalent.’ In short, the time and place of writing five minutes ago are no longer available and, thus, the author of five minutes ago is also no longer available (Benveniste, 1961). However, in the case of Black feminist writing, the opposite occurs; the notion of a ‘determined place and time’ is used to fix and solidify Black feminist writing, resulting in essentialist configurations of authenticity and homogeneity.

This thesis picks up Black feminism’s strategic engagement with the politics of pronouns. This is particularly evident in Chapter 3, ‘An Analysis and Application of “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power”’ and Chapter 4, ‘The Aporetics of Intersectionality.’ In both of these chapters, close re-reading of the use of pronouns identifies the ways in which semantics operate as instruments of connection and disconnection. Lorde’s writing shifts constantly back and forth from the first to the third person, including frequent use of collective pronouns. These shifting positions are performative of her claims about difference, subjectivity and identity.

The fluctuations between different pronouns create a polyrhythmic effect that enables different signifiers of identity and subjectivity to be played around with. Lorde grew up within a household of ‘...that Grenadian poly-language...’ (Lorde, 1996:7), where ‘[t]he sensual content of life was masked and cryptic, but attended in well-coded phrases’ (Lorde, 1996:22). For example:

We were never dressed too lightly, but rather “in next kin to nothing.”
Neck skin to nothing? Impassable and impossible distances were measured by the distance “from Hog to Kick ’em Jenny.” *Hog? Kick ’em Jenny?...A* mild reprimand was accompanied not by a slap on the behind, but a

“smack on the backass,” or on the “bamsy.” You sat on your “bam-bam,” but anything between your hipbones and upper thighs was consigned to the “lower-region.” (Lorde, 1996:21; emphasis in original)

Here, Lorde locates the ‘well-coded’ (Lorde, 1996:22) within the polyrhythms of polyvocality and poly-language. It could be argued that Lorde exposes the politics of signifying practices, and the relationship between location and speech - whether that is the location of the private domestic sphere, the location of being Black and/or the location of the ‘...“other tongues”...’ (Boyce Davies, 1994:153).

Lorde’s use of Black feminist literary traditions of polyvocality and polyrhythms is explored in Chapter 5, drawing on Gates, Jr. (1988) as a critical lens to examine the function of literary devices in *Zami* (Lorde, 1996). Chapter 5 analyses how the movement between pronouns such as ‘I,’ ‘we,’ ‘us,’ ‘our,’ ‘my,’ ‘myself,’ ‘me’ and ‘her’ within the ‘Epilogue’ of *Zami* produces the effect of shifting positions. However, I argue in Chapter 5 that the shift in position, represented by the shift in pronouns, does not resolve the aporia of positionality, because the singular and collective plural inevitably refer and defer to each other. Pennycook explains that pronouns:

...are in fact very complex and political words, always raising difficult issues of who is being represented. There is, therefore, never an unproblematic “we” or “you” or “they” or “I” or “he/she.” (Pennycook, 1994:173)

These difficult issues become more pronounced when it is a Black woman who is being represented. Using the pronoun, ‘we,’ Jordan succinctly states that ‘[t]he problem is that we are saying *language*, but really dealing with power’ (Jordan,

1972:35; emphasis in original). The conscious political use of pronouns within Black feminism functions to disrupt racist, homophobic, patriarchal positionings. For example, Hill Collins explains:

...I argue that Black women intellectuals best contribute to a Black women's group standpoint by using their experiences as situated knowers. To adhere to this epistemological tenet required that, when appropriate, I reject the pronouns "they" and "their" when describing U.S. Black women and our ideas and replace these terms with the terms "we," "us," and "our." Using the distancing terms "they" and "their" when describing my own group and our experiences might enhance both my credentials as a scholar and the credibility of my arguments in some academic settings. But by taking this epistemological stance that reflects my disciplinary training as a sociologist, I invoke standards of certifying truth about which I remain ambivalent. (Hill Collins, 2000:19)

The Critic as Host

This thesis could be seen as my hosting, with all of the problematics of being a host outlined in Chapter 2, the event of Lorde in conversation with scholars such as Bhabha, Boyce Davies, Butler, Crenshaw, Fanon, Haraway, Hill Collins, hooks, Seshadri-Crooks and Spivak, to name but a few of the guests. This is in order to make a decisive intervention into current thinking about issues such as identity formation, difference, position, voice, intersectionality and what Hall (1996:17) refers to as the '...constitutive outside...'. It is a deliberate transgression of fixed, theoretical and disciplinary borders to attempt a space of

emotional and ‘...“intellectual hospitality”...’ (Bennett, 2003 and Kaufman, 2001, cited in Molz and Gibson, 2007:2), because ‘...what is at stake is not only the thinking *of* hospitality, but thinking *as* hospitality’ (Friese, 2004, cited in Molz and Gibson, 2007:2; emphasis in original). Indeed, it will become apparent in the thesis that Derrida’s (2000) notion of the impossibility of hospitality, in terms of who is host and who is guest, is an important methodological tool. The impossibility of hospitality is used to deconstruct the constitution, position and play of power relations in regards to the production of the ‘other’ and what the ‘other’ produces.

Historical Amnesia

This intervention tracks and resists the ‘...historical amnesia that keeps us working to invent the wheel every time we have to go to the store for bread’ (Lorde, 1980a:117) that is so well-documented by Black feminism. In ‘A Burst of Light’ (1988), Lorde provides a personal and poignant reflection that brings in an added, tangential dimension to the waste of ‘...working to invent the wheel...’ (Lorde, 1980a:117). In ‘A Burst of Light’ Lorde reflects on the loss and isolation that not knowing about the ‘wheel’ gives rise to:

I often think of Angelina Weld Grimké dying alone in an apartment in New York City in 1958 while I was a young Black Lesbian struggling in isolation at Hunter College, and I think of what it could have meant in terms of sisterhood and survival for each one of us to have known of the other’s existence: for me to have had her words and her wisdom, and for her to have known I needed them! (Lorde, 1988:288)

The point I need to emphasise is that this thesis is a deliberate and purposeful intervention to confront the ‘...neither accidental nor benign’ (Hill Collins, 2000:3) ‘historical amnesia’ of Lorde’s work that is representative of the travesty of suppressing the scholarship of Black feminism. The thesis is a work of remembering.

I want to highlight three mutually contingent points in relation to ‘historical amnesia’ that recur in different guises throughout the thesis. I introduce the first point with a piece written by Jordan (1982). Jordan describes an encounter that took place during a Black Sisters Speak-Out, where:

...one of the women announced that we should realize our debt to the great Black women who have preceded us in history. “We are here,” she said, “because of the struggle of women like,” and here her sentence broke down. She tried again. “We have come this far because of all the Black women who fought for us like, like . . .” and, here, only one name came to her mouth: “Sojourner Truth!” she exclaimed, clearly relieved to think of it, but also embarrassed because she couldn’t keep going. “And,” she tried to continue, nevertheless, “the other Black women like . . .” but here somebody in the audience spoke to her rescue, by calling aloud the name Harriet Tubman. At this point I interrupted to observe that now we had *two* names for 482 years of our Afro-American history. “What about Mary McLeod Bethune?” somebody else ventured at last. “That’s three!” I remarked, in the manner of a referee: “Do we have a fourth?” There was a silence. Thoroughly embarrassed, the first woman looked at me and said, “Listen. I could come up with a whole list of Black women if my life

depended on it.” “Well,” I had to tell her, “It does.” (Jordan, 1982:133; ellipsis and emphasis in original)

The first point is that resisting ‘historical amnesia’ goes beyond ‘...the waste of an amnesia that robs us of lessons of the past...’ (Lorde, 1982:139) and it goes beyond ‘...having to repeat and relearn the same old lessons over and over...’ (Lorde, 1980a:117). My first point is that resisting ‘historical amnesia’ is vital because our life depends upon it, and as such, it opens up a range of issues explored within the thesis about the place and production of the subject and subjectivity. ‘Historical amnesia’ stands in direct relation to the position of Black women and what Black women produce in society. It is an issue about recognition (or not) of the existence (or not) of Black women, their experiences and what they produce.

Thus, it is possible to re-read ‘historical amnesia’ as a manifestation of the ‘...false and treacherous connections’ (Lorde, 1980a:115) that Lorde refers to because ‘...we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals’ (Lorde, 1980a:115), which leads ‘...many Black women into testifying against themselves’ (Lorde, 1980a:121). This is articulated by Jordan:

From looking around the room I knew there were Black women right there who face critical exposure to bodily assault, alcoholic mothers, and racist insults and graffiti in the dorms. I knew that the academic curriculum omitted the truth of their difficult lives. I knew that they certainly would not be found welcome in the marketplace after they got their degrees. But the insistent concern was more intimate and more pitiful and more desperate than any of those threatening conditions might suggest. The

abject plea of those Black women students was ruthlessly minimal: “If you see me, you could say, ‘*Hi.*’ ” Let me know that you see me; let me know I exist. Never mind a conversation between us, but, please, if you see me, you could say “*Hi.*” (Jordan, 1982:133-134; emphasis in original)

The second point is articulated by Brah and Phoenix, who explain that:

By revisiting these historical developments, we do not wish to suggest that the past unproblematically provides an answer to the present. On the contrary, we would wish to learn from and build upon these insights through critique so that they can shed new light on current predicaments. (Brah and Phoenix, 2004:75)

Indeed, it is precisely due to the fact that revisiting Lorde does not unproblematically provide answers to current predicaments that makes her a sharp critical lens of analysis for the present. In other words, my encounters with unresolved tensions have yielded the most fruitful opportunities for productive thinking.

The third point is the need to track and resist the urge to ‘...romanticize our past in order to be aware of how it seeds our present’ (Lorde, 1982:139) - an urge that is particularly seductive in relation to the iconic figure and work of Audre Lorde that I love and respect.

Suspicion of Lorde, the Icon

The significance of this point is that ‘...an iconicity that is altogether too good to be true’ (Suleri, 1992:250) blurs critical analysis, not least because it freezes the subject. In other words, the effect of “‘Audre-ism’” (Joseph, 2009:249) and elevation to the status of ‘Shero’ (Betsch Cole, 2009:231) could work to foreclose

the audacity of any questioning, dissatisfaction, disappointment or disagreement with ‘...the most revered, powerful, and influential African American feminist writer/activist of the twentieth century...’ (Guy-Sheftall, 2009:253). Suleri warns that:

...the embarrassed privilege granted to racially encoded feminism does indeed suggest a rectitude that could be its own theoretical undoing. The concept of the postcolonial itself is too frequently robbed of historical specificity in order to function as a preapproved allegory for any mode of discursive contestation. The coupling of *postcolonial* with *woman*, however, almost inevitably leads to the simplicities that underlie unthinking celebrations of oppression, elevating the racially female voice into a metaphor for “the good.” Such metaphoricity cannot exactly be called essentialist, but it certainly functions as an impediment to a reading that attempts to look beyond obvious questions of good and evil. (Suleri, 1992:250; emphasis in original)

We would do well to heed Suleri’s warning in the current attention towards Lorde, who now seems to be in vogue. For example, 2004 saw the publication of De Veaux’s acclaimed biography of Lorde and *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, edited by Wylie Hall. In 2005 the University of Louisville used a donation of one million dollars to create the ‘Audre Lorde Chair in Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality’ that was filled in 2007 (Guy-Sheftall, 2009:259). In 2009 the Spellman Archives, featuring Lorde’s papers, was opened to the public and *I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde* was published (Byrd, et al., 2009). 2012 saw the release of the multi award-winning film, *Audre Lorde – The Berlin Years 1984 to 1992*, that has travelled across the U.S.A. and Europe.

Currently in production is a volume of essays with the working title, *Audre Lorde's Legacies: Transnational Encounters, Creativity and Activism*. In addition, the number of conference symposiums, keynotes, blogs⁶ and references to the influence of Lorde are evidence of current interest in her work; for example, in the work of Ahmed (2009, 2010, 2012) and her trend-setting phrase, 'Feminist Killjoys,' and the British Association for American Studies' (BAAS) (2009) 58th Annual Conference due to be held in April, 2013 will host a symposium dedicated to the work of Lorde.

Although this turn to Lorde is gratifying, I hold Suleri's position of suspicion, articulated vividly by duCille's use of Moraga's metaphor of a bridge:

Both black women writers and the black feminist critics who have brought them from the depths of obscurity into the ranks of the academy have been such bridges. The trouble is that, as Moraga points out, bridges get walked on over and over and over again. This sense of being a bridge - of being walked on and passed over, of being used up and burnt out, of having to "publish while perishing", as some have described their situations - seems to be a part of the human condition of many black women scholars. (duCille, 1994:254)

It would seem that the more Black feminist scholarship is welcomed into the fold of academia, the more vigilant Black feminists need to be about the function, dangers and consequences of this welcome. We have nothing to be grateful for.

⁶ See Mohr (2013), Thestifledartist's Blog (2012) and Tumblr (no date) for examples of blogs.

Historical amnesia functions in two mutually constitutive directions in terms of what is remembered and what is forgotten. The point is that what is remembered and what is forgotten both pose a threat to the existence of Black women, and to what Black women produce, not least because what is remembered and what is forgotten have the potential to undermine the resources that Black women have access to in relation to the development and survival of a sense of sisterhood. The punch line is, as Jordan (1982), Lorde (1980, 1988) and Suleri (1992) make clear, that this is performed both in and through Black women themselves, ‘...coated in myths, stereotypes, and expectations from the outside, definitions not our own’ (Lorde, 1983a:170), so Black women become the mechanism for what is both remembered and forgotten in the service of a racist, homophobic patriarchy.

Black Feminist Theory: The Function of Absence and Presence

Within this thesis, ‘breaking bread’ (hooks and West, 1991) with contemporary issues is a method of demonstrating the relevance and translation of Lorde as a theoretical lens to critically analyse the production of Black women, and what Black women produce. The paradox addressed in this thesis is that scholarship that follows Lorde enables an enhanced, nuanced, detailed re-reading, but, also, begs the question of ‘epistemic violence’ (Spivak, 1988:280), appropriation and foreclosure of her work in particular, and Black feminist scholarship in general. Hence, what is ‘post’ about post-colonialism and post-modernism? (Ata Aidoo, 1991:152). Boyce Davies (1994:83) explains that in the ‘post,’ ‘...we are automatically interpellated in ideologies of posting or postponing.’ Rather than

asking what is ‘post,’ Mukherjee (1990) reframes the questions to ask, ‘*Whose Post-Colonialism and Whose Postmodernism?*’ The question moves the debate on from the intersecting issues of the production and position of Black feminist theory to an inquiry about:

1. The suppression of Black feminist theory as a manoeuvre of colonisation, where acts of appropriation are fundamental to maintaining racist, homophobic, patriarchal supremacy;
2. The ways in which the suppression of Black feminist theory is disavowed and, just as importantly, the function of that disavowal in relation to the ambivalence present in all manoeuvres of appropriation.

The implications of these lines of inquiry are taken up in Chapter 2, which demonstrates that tracking the manoeuvres of appropriation is tricky because it involves much more than a tracking of the binary of inclusion or exclusion.

In other words, tracking where, when and why the work of Lorde in particular, and the work of Black feminist theory in general, are included and excluded in contemporary scholarship, reading lists and citations could produce quantitative data of strategic use, but it misses something. Firstly, the function of the absence and presence is missed; actually, to be more specific, the production of the binary, and what the binary functions to produce, are at risk of being occluded by the fixation on the binary. For example, it could evade an analysis of ‘...the rules of recognition...’ (Bhabha, 1994:110) that determine the basis of inclusion and exclusion of Black feminist theory within contemporary scholarship. Secondly, the binary of absence/presence misses the event of the space in-between. The point is that missing the in-between space renders that

space unacknowledged, so that the happenings in the event of the boundary are foreclosed.

The same points could be applied to the absence/presence of the specific Black, Asian and minority ethnic women's services that I have been engaged with at Trafford Rape Crisis. The analysis can be broadened out to any specific service provision for Black, Asian and minority ethnic peoples located within a general service, or, indeed, located within a racist, homophobic patriarchy. For example, interrogation about both the number of calls taken on the Black, Asian and minority ethnic women's helpline, and the ratio of Black, Asian and minority ethnic women within the organisation - as well as tracking the number of times a Black woman's (as service-user and service-provider) voice is present or absent, recognised, unrecognised or misrecognised, acknowledged or unacknowledged - could produce quantitative data of strategic use, but it misses something. What it misses is an inquiry into what the Black, Asian and minority ethnic women's service functions to contain within the organisation. It misses an inquiry into what is happening in the in-between space of the binary of absence/presence. It misses an inquiry into what the fixation on the binary functions to produce and what produces the fixation in the first place. Starting and ending with the binary of absence/presence is a disavowal of the anxiety of existing with the construction of the 'other.'

Hybridity

I find Bhabha's (1994) idea of hybridity a particularly useful, analytic lens to think about the production and function of the position of Lorde's work specifically, and the activism of Black feminist theory in general:

If the effect of colonial power is seen to be the *production* of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs. The ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority enables a form of subversion, founded on undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention. It is traditional academic wisdom that the presence of authority is properly established through the non-exercise of private judgement and the exclusion of reasons in conflict with the authoritative reason. The recognition of authority, however, requires a validation of its source that must be immediately, even intuitively, apparent - "You have that in your countenance which I would fain call master" - and held in common (rules of recognition). What is left unacknowledged is the paradox of such a demand for proof and the resulting ambivalence for positions of authority. (Bhabha, 1994:112; emphasis and parentheses in original)

Hill Collins' (2000:15) analysis of the *not silenced*, but *not too noisy* positioning of Sojourner Truth's contribution to Black feminist critical theory provides a good example of how this tactic of 'hybridization' works. Although Sojourner Truth's (1851) speech, 'Ain't I A Woman?,' has not been silenced, as evidenced by

frequent citations of her question, neither has it been accredited with the ‘noisy command’ of her intellectual prowess, as evidenced by the complexity of the philosophical, theoretical and linguistic movements within the speech.

From a political perspective that sees Lorde’s work and Black feminist discourse in the obscuring shadow of hybridization, it is possible to see Foucault’s power/knowledge relation at work. ‘Hybridization’ would be a procedure by which ‘...the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed...’ (Foucault, 1981:52). This ‘...important change of perspective...’ that Bhabha (1994:112) refers to is taken up within the thesis as a method of close re-reading to track the implicated grounds of hybridity that Lorde and Black feminism stand on. This perspective takes seriously Mbembe’s caution that:

...domination is a regime that involves not just control but conviviality, even connivance - as shown by the constant compromises, the small tokens of fealty...individuals are constantly being trapped in a net of rituals that reaffirm tyranny, and in that these rituals, however minor, are intimate in nature. (Mbembe, 2001:66)

Bhabha (1994), Mbembe (2001) and Caselli (2005) bring a number of interconnecting problematics to the table that are pivotal to this thesis:

1. To what extent, how and why Lorde should be regarded ‘...critically as a problem, not a solution, as a sign to be interrogated, a locus of contradictions’ (Carby, 1987:15).
2. What strategies do Lorde and Black feminists use to grapple with the aporia of positionality?

3. How do Lorde and Black feminists seek out possibilities for subversive manoeuvres in the in-between space of hybridity, as exemplified by Anzaldúa's (2007) redefining of the hybrid position in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.

Borderlands of the Dialectic

Deconstructionist and post-colonial approaches reflected in Bhabha's explication of 'hybridization' locate the space and possibility for subversion within the '...undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention' (Bhabha, 1994:112). Speaking in relation to Lorde and the activism of Black feminist theory, I would contend that an aspect of the 'undecidability' is to be simultaneously implicated and subversive.

The borderlands of dialectic movement between the implicated and the subversive is difficult to occupy for a number of reasons: firstly, picking up on the metaphor of movement, occupation of the tension between the implicated and the subversive invokes a kind of motion sickness; secondly, occupation of movement between these tensions that constitute the dialectic entails giving up learnt strategies for coping with the symptoms of the motion sickness. It entails not resorting to resolving the movement within the dialectic. For example, staying within the dialectic means not resorting to learnt patterns for relating across difference (Lorde, 1980a:115). The dialectic is neither complicity, inversion or replication, nor is it a split position of an either/or. So, the dialectic is inherently a place of loss - loss of resolution, loss of stability, loss of security, loss of the decided and loss of the prior. However, this configuration is a trick because the

notion of loss implies that resolution, stability, security, decidability and the prior existed to be lost.

Trying hard not to fall foul of the trick, I tackle the tricky business of tracking Lorde's and Black feminists' occupations of the never-ending movement between positions in the dialectic. The line of enquiry in Chapter 2 traces the tricky, hybrid position of ambivalence inherent within the power relations of Black and white feminisms. Chapter 2 is a detailed interrogation of the dialectic within 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' (Lorde, 1979a:60). Re-reading Lorde through the critical lenses of Fanon (2008), Butler (1997c) and Bhabha (1994), Chapter 2 picks up on the anxieties of recognition of authority, the requirement of validation and the demand for proof that the undecidability of colonisation is founded upon. In the aforementioned quote, Bhabha (1994:112) refers to undecidability as a site for subversion and this Derridian idea is reiterated throughout the thesis as a tool to '*...dismantle the master's house*' (Lorde, 1979b:112; emphasis in original).

Furthermore, Chapter 3, 'An Analysis and Application of "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power"' investigates Black feminist contestations of the totalizing effect of performative re-inscriptions of oppressive constructions of Black women. A close re-reading of Lorde's (1978a) 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,' in conjunction with Butler's (1999) theory of performativity and Hill Collins' (2000:123-148) critical examination of 'The Sexual Politics of Black Womanhood,' provides tools to open up the inevitable fissures found in all re-inscriptions.

Chapter 3 dismantles the movement of reiteration used to establish and maintain the subjugation of Black women through sexual violation. The chapter proposes that within the dialectic of reiteration can be found a productive crisis of tension, with the potential for a productive Black feminist political resistance. It makes me think of the name ‘Rape Crisis’ in a new light. The name is rooted historically and politically within the women’s liberation movement (Brownmiller, 1993, 1999), and as such, remains the name, even though both a frequent reaction to, and the impact of, its enunciation, are extremely uncomfortable. The word ‘crisis’ invokes the idea of something immediate, traumatic and overwhelming, and most people’s association with the words ‘rape crisis’ is that of the crisis of a rape that has just happened. However, survivors who use Rape Crisis services speak about the emotional impact of rape as having no time-frame. In other words, the trauma of rape destabilises time so that terms such as ‘recent’ and ‘historic’ rape have no bearing on women’s lived experience. So what is the crisis? The crisis is that which is found in the following tensions: between silence and speaking out; between the contrasting constructions of ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’; and between the patriarchal, reiterative, constitutive tools of abuse of power and those of feminist consciousness-raising. The crisis is a productive site for feminist de-constituting and re-constituting of thinking and interventions about sexual violence.

Chapter 4 demonstrates that ‘The Aporetics of Intersectionality’ are contingent upon the indeterminate positions of host and guest, and the undecidability of borders. Analysis of the aporia of intersectionality enables a nuanced understanding of the unavailability of the solution of intersectionality. The chapter proposes that it is within the emotionally difficult site of the

unavailable solution that the possibilities of intersectionality as a solution can be thought about.

In addition, Chapter 5 draws on Spivak's (1997:ix) '...“the question of the preface”' in order to examine the 'Epilogue' of *Zami* (Lorde, 1996) not in an attempt to anchor the text, but, rather, in an attempt to occupy the aporia of positionality. The chapter uses this occupation as methodology by which to investigate '...no stable identity, no stable origin, no stable end' (Spivak, 1997:xii). Chapter 5 is also concerned with Lorde's occupation of the aporia of the speaking position, the insecure signification of a name and tensions within the '...house of difference...' (Lorde, 1996:197).

Black Feminist Author Function

This thesis is a literary textual analysis of the work of Lorde. The task itself, and the methodology available within literary criticism to undertake this task, present a set of tensions. These tensions potentially undermine the legitimacy of the very task this thesis sets out to perform.

Two key objectives support the theoretical scaffolding of this thesis: firstly, this thesis seeks to perform an intervention in its own right of explicating the work of Lorde (1934 - 1992), located by some as part of second-wave feminism; secondly, this thesis seeks to assert Lorde's authorial legitimacy to intervene in current third-wave feminist, post-modernist and post-colonial preoccupations about difference.

However, theories of literary criticism found in current third-wave feminist, post-modernist and post-colonial thinking potentially disrupt the basis of the interventions of this thesis, so that they are actually undone. Barthes (1967, 1971) and Foucault (1969), for example, present a set of complex problematics where the function, position and existence of the author trouble the function, position and existence of the subject and subjectivity. Burke articulates the complexity in the following way:

If knowledge itself, or what we take to be knowledge, is entirely intradiscursive, and if, as it is claimed, the subject has no *anchorage* within discourse, then man as the subject of knowledge is thoroughly displaced and dislodged. Cognition and consciousness arise as intralinguistic effects or metaphors, by-products, as it were, of a linguistic order that has evolved... (Burke, 2008:14; emphasis in original)

These tensions are bound fast with the aporia of positionality and take on particular significance in conjunction with the political imperatives of Black feminist scholarship. The particular significance that I am alluding to is taken up by Boyce Davies' question:

But how does this all shift once Black women are introduced into the discussion? I believe that questions of Black female subjectivity bring a more complex and heightened awareness to all theoreticians... (Boyce Davies, 1994:29)

Once Black feminist authorship and literature are introduced into the discussion, it provokes the following questions: how does Black feminist scholarship anchor a position whilst, simultaneously, being unanchored? How

does Black feminist scholarship establish legitimacy and authority in the face of ‘the death of the author’ (Barthes, 1967)? How does Black feminism contend with the absence of author when a key objective of Black feminism is to contest the absence of Black feminist authors and texts? How can ‘the death of the author’ and the corresponding death of the subject sit with Jordan’s (1982:133) conviction that our lives depend on naming, remembering, recognising and acknowledging the lives, activism and theory of Black feminists?

Lorde is concerned with the absence of the Black female subject and Black lesbian feminism, and I am concerned with how Lorde takes up these absences. Let me be clear that this thesis does not take *absence* to mean *not present*. This point is taken up by Lorde (1979c) in ‘An Open Letter to Mary Daly’ in response to Daly’s (1978) book, *Gyn/Ecology*,⁷ where Lorde posits the presence of the Black female subject and her work as constituting an absence:

So the question arises in my mind, Mary, do you ever really read the work of Black women? Did you ever read my words, or did you merely finger through them for quotations which you thought might valuably support an already conceived idea concerning some old and distorted connection between us? (Lorde, 1979c:68)

The principles that Lorde articulates here, when read through Foucault’s (1969) ‘What Is an Author?’, prompt a more nuanced set of questions than I have just asked. Foucault explains that:

⁷ Interestingly, the absence of a response from Daly to Lorde’s letter prompted Lorde to write: ‘The following letter was written to Mary Daly, author of *Gyn/Ecology* on May 6, 1979. Four months later, having received no reply, I opened it to the community of women’ (Lorde, 1979c:66).

Doing so means overturning the traditional problem, no longer raising the questions: How can a free subject penetrate the substance of things and give it meaning? How can it activate the rules of a language from within and thus give rise to the designs which are properly its own? Instead, these questions will be raised: How, under what conditions, and in what forms can something like a subject appear in the order of discourse? What place can it occupy in each type of discourse, what functions can it assume, and by obeying what rules? In short, it is a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analyzing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse. (Foucault, 1979:118)

Re-reading Lorde through the microscope of postmodernist, literary criticism orientates the analysis through a set of interconnected themes that include the conditions of representation of subjectivity, refracted through the prism of semiotics and intertextuality. The themes of intention, name and technologies of the self are an aspect of the production of ‘...the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning’ (Foucault 1969:119).

Question of the Name

Although she was given the name, ‘Audrey Geraldine Lorde,’ by her parents, Lorde is not known by this name. Actually, no one can be known by their name and this point is the basis for deconstructionist theories of the function of the name that are taken up within this thesis. Furthermore, this theoretical approach, when applied to the ‘not knowing’ of Black feminist scholarship and the treatment

of the names of Black women writers, ‘...points to this “figure” that, at least in appearance, is outside it and antecedes it’ (Foucault 1969:101).

The ‘name’ becomes a methodology for understanding the historical and political outsider, and the ‘excess’ position of Black feminists and Black feminist theory. ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ (Lorde, 1979a:60) because it is outside of, and precedes, the name, the configuration of the name and the position of the name.

In particular, deconstructionist theories of the name enable close re-readings of the many names of Lorde. The list of names that Lorde uses include: Zami, Rey Domini (*Audre Lorde* in Latin) (Rich, 1979:50) and ‘Gambda Adisa, meaning Warrior: She Who Makes Her Meaning Known’ (Reuman, 1997). In addition, certain titles or phrases, such as ‘the sister outsider’ (Byrd, 2009:5) and ‘Warrior Poet’ (De Veaux, 2004), have become synonymous with the name, work and identity of Lorde. However, any equation of the bearer and the name of the bearer is problematic. Derrida proposes that:

...you will never be your name, you never have been, even when, and especially when you have answered to it. The name is made to do without the life of the bearer, and is therefore always the name of someone dead. (Derrida, 1987:39)

The point Derrida is making here is that all names are outside of, and precede, the person/subject/object because any name refers and defers to an infinite web of historical, social and cultural contexts and concepts. A name carries death in the sense that any attempt to fix any name to any stable entity is impossible. Thus, a name signifies the demise of decidability, with all of the implications of mourning associated with bereavement. Any attempt to equate

Lorde with ‘the sister outsider’ and ‘Warrior Poet,’ *les amies* and African mythic Fon figures (such as Afrekete and MawuLisa) is ‘always already’ dead and lost.

At the age of four, Lorde:

‘...did not like the tail of the Y hanging down below the line in Audrey, and would always forget to put it on...’ (Lorde, 1996:14).

Lorde explains that ‘I used to love the evenness of AUDRELORDE...’ (Lorde, 1996:14). Here, a close re-reading could interpret Lorde’s description as invoking the spatial and temporal ‘outside’ and ‘precedes’ quality of a name that Derrida translates as the distinction between the name and the bearer of the name. A close re-reading could understand Lorde as invoking the ‘...drama of naming...’ (Derrida, 1992a:187), where the drama includes the drama of the implicated ‘boundary event’ (Minh-ha, 2011).

Both the event of naming, and the event of the name, involve removing the anchor of ‘proper’ from the term, ‘proper name.’⁸ The implications of this are huge and go to the heart of longstanding, contested debates about the proper name for distinctive, intersecting domains of feminism, and the name and position of ‘differences that matter’ (Ahmed, 1998) within feminism. These debates are taken up in Chapter 2, ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ (Lorde, 1979a:60) and in Chapter 4, ‘The Aporetics of Intersectionality,’ where the problematics of the name ‘Black feminist’ is flagged up.

The dialectic of ‘Black feminism’ is in using the name to signify ‘differences that matter’ whilst contesting/resisting totalizing, homogenous, fixed

⁸ The event is symbolised in the event/drama of naming ceremonies. In an interview with Dorothee Nolte, Lorde explains that “[i]n African cultures, the ritual bestowing of a name is of great significance...A child receives its first name eight days after birth, but it receives new names at decisive events its whole life long.” (Nolte, 1986:143).

domains that foreclose ‘differences that matter.’ Thinking specifically about the different domains of feminist scholarship, and of course, this thesis concerns Black feminist scholarship, the words of Derrida present a set of interconnected challenges with wide ranging ramifications for literary criticism:

...there is no such thing as a literary essence or a specifically literary domain strictly identifiable as such...this name of literature perhaps is destined to remain improper, with no criteria, or assured concept or reference, so that “literature” has something to do with the drama of naming, the law of the name and the name of the law. (Derrida, 1992a:187)

Perhaps Lorde recognised the essence of this in her creation of a biomythography, transgressing domains of the self (bio), writing (graphy) and myth genres. Thus, Lorde troubles the criteria for the domain of a conventional autobiography, which goes on to trouble the domains of prescribed identity and demarcations. This is illustrated in the ‘Epilogue’ of *Zami*, where the movement within self, myth and name is outside, and precedes, given domains. Lorde explains that:

Ma-Liz, DeLois, Louise Briscoe, Aunt Anni, Linda, and Genevieve; MawuLisa, thunder, sky, sun, the great mother of us all; and Afrekete, her youngest daughter, the mischievous linguist, trickster, best-beloved, whom we must all become. Their names, selves, faces feed me like corn before labor. I live each of them as a piece of me... (Lorde, 1996:223; italics in original)

Zami: A New Spelling of My Name is an interesting title and statement, since ‘Zami’ is neither a phonetic nor orthographic reconfiguration of the name, ‘Audre Lorde.’

Lorde's use of the name 'Zami' draws on the French expression, *les amies*, linking this to intimate connections between women so that the theme of Lorde's experience as a Black lesbian is performatively contained within the name of the text. This strategy challenges the notion of a determinate domain of text. *Zami* is simultaneously the title of the text and the subject of the text, the method for explicating messages within the text and signifier of Lorde's multiple subjectivities. Sánchez Calle comments that:

The title of this book, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, places it in the tradition of the slave narratives, in which slaves changed their names after reaching freedom. Likewise, Lorde, by choosing for herself a different name from the one her parents gave her, challenges the control of the dominant culture, and prevents others from speaking and naming on her behalf. (Sánchez Calle, 1996:163; italics in original)

The politics of naming are picked up in Christian's (1990) analysis of how '[t]he name is made to do without the life of the bearer...' (Derrida, 1987:39) in relation to Black slave women writers. Christian provides a detailed account of the way that slave narratives were constructed to omit both the name and the life of the bearer. Christian cites the example of '*...Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) written by Harriet Jacobs under the pseudonym, Linda Brent' (Christian, 1990:222) and draws on Morrison's introductory remarks to a public reading of *Beloved*, at which:

Morrison pointed out that their omissions were partly due to the fact that these ex-slaves addressed a white audience. Even more important, she suggested, they omitted events too horrible and too dangerous for them to

recall. Morrison went on to state that these consistent comments made by nineteenth-century ex-slaves about the deliberate omissions in their narratives intrigued her and that this was the initial impulse for her writing the novel that would become *Beloved*...in the last words of *Beloved*: “This was not a story to pass on.” (Christian, 1990:222; italics in original)

These points are performatively embodied in Morrison’s dedication of *Beloved* to the nameless ‘...“60 million or more”’ (Christian, 1990:225).

duCille follows a similar analytic trajectory in her examination of the position of Black feminist writing:

One hundred thirty years ago, former slave Harriet Jacobs was able to publish her life’s story only with the authenticating stamp of the well-known white abolitionist Lydia Maria Child as editor and copyright holder. “I have signed and sealed the contract with Thayer & Eldridge, in my name, and told them to take out the copyright in my name,” Child wrote in a letter to Jacobs in 1860. “Under the circumstances *your* name could not be used, you know.” (duCille, 1994:238; emphasis in original)

In a similar vein, Simmonds provides a contemporary context and incidence of appropriation of the name:

In public, at conferences for example, I insist that my full name appears on my name tag. In a society that cannot accommodate names that come from “other” cultures, this can be a frustrating exercise. It is no wonder that many Black children will Anglicize their names to avoid playground

taunts . . . and much worse. We are still fighting colonialism. (Simmonds, 1996:113; ellipsis in original)

The racist act of appropriating a name, documented here by duCille and Simmonds, is troubled by Derrida's distinction between the name and bearer of the name. Derrida explains that a name is '[a] property that one cannot appropriate; it signs you without belonging to you...' (Derrida, n.d.:119). The anxiety of the lacuna within the ambivalence of 'signs you without belonging to you,' that is disavowed by the coloniser, is a potential space for subversion.

There is something freeing in the idea of the dead, unanchored name. Whilst I appreciate the historical and political Black literary and Black vernacular traditions of the importance and use of names, Derrida's work offers the dialectic of the name as a site for antiracist, anti-homophobic, feminist sedition. For example, contesting the property, signature, singularity of name and deconstructing the 'proper' of 'proper name' function to contest and deconstruct oppressive constructions of authenticity. Derrida explains the aporia of the 'proper name' as:

The proper name, in its aleatoriness, should have no meaning and should spend itself in immediate reference. But the chance or the misery of its arbitrary character (always other in each case) is that its inscription in language always affects it with a potential for meaning, and for no longer being proper once it has a meaning. (Derrida, 1984:118)

Throughout this thesis, the aporia as a condition of thinking enables the possible within the impossible.

The significance of this in relation to the activism of Black feminist theory can be illustrated in the application of aporia as a condition to the components of the term, 'Black feminist theory.' The aporia is an 'active' condition. The aporia messes up the condition of theory. The aporia messes up the condition of meanings inscribed in 'Black' and 'feminist.' I contend that the anarchy of aporia, the chaos, rebellion, lawlessness and mayhem of aporia provide conditions for feminist resistance and transformation.

Summary of Chapters

In Chapter 2, Lorde's (1979a:60) statement that 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' goes to the heart of fundamental questions concerning the basis, membership, definition and aim of feminism. Here, I argue that 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' is contingent upon the fact that '...racist social structures create racist psychic structures...' (Oliver, 2001:34). The chapter uses methods of literary criticism, including the theoretical lens of intertextuality as intersubjectivity, for a close re-reading of the statement that 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface.'

Chapter 2 re-reads Lorde through a re-reading of Fanon's (2008:4) concept of 'epidermalization' to go beyond the racist regime of visibility, suggesting that the mimicry of 'blackface' includes mechanisms of the 'psychic life of power' (Butler, 1997c). Bhabha's analysis of the inevitable ambivalence of mimicry in the act of colonisation is used to explore ramifications of the '*...almost the same,*

but not quite...' (Bhabha, 1994:86; emphasis in original) for 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface.'

The chapter includes an experimental, imaginary conversation between Lorde and a diverse range of interdisciplinary, critical thinkers as a pedagogical intervention that transgresses spatial and temporal borders. The focus of this intervention is both an exploration and application of 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' in relation to the activism of Black feminist theory, with specific reference to the necessity of Black women-only reflective spaces and service provision.

In Chapter 3, strategies of a close re-reading explore the tensions and constraints of reclamation as a mode of political resistance in 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power' (Lorde, 1978a). Whilst the 'boundary event' (Minh-ha, 2011) of the title, 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,' is structured within unspecified demarcations of 'uses of,' this chapter explores the extent to which even unspecified demarcations constitute forms of demarcation in themselves. Thus, the potential and limitations of discourses of reclamation and interventions of resignification are examined alongside the aporia of positionality.

The tension explored in this chapter is that in adopting an authorial speaking position to undo prescribed racist, homophobic, patriarchal positions of the erotic, Lorde edges dangerously close to proposing 'uses of the erotic' that are equally prescribed, albeit from a Black feminist perspective.

Chapter 3 goes on to make an application of the analysis to some feminist interventions to confront sexual violence against Black women. The chapter

analyses an encounter of gender violation between Hill Collins and Sarah Bartmann (Hill Collins, 2000:141-143) through the theoretical lens of ‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power’ to scrutinise the production and function of distortion, and the objectification of Black women. This chapter highlights the implications of ‘uses of the erotic’ as a methodology and foundation for the activism of Black feminist theory.

In Chapter 4, ‘The Aporetics of Intersectionality,’ I re-read Crenshaw’s (1989) theory of intersectionality as a theory of the aporia of borders. This chapter traces the solution of unavailability in intersectionality not in order to discredit intersectionality as a solution, but, rather, to disrupt intersectionality as a unified solution. The point is that if we are not careful, the seduction of intersectionality as a solution to confront unified, homogeneous constructions becomes a unified solution in itself (Spivak, 1985:55). I argue that analytic borders created between analyses of the structural and analyses of the subject/subjective/subjectivity, using intersectionality, run counter to the spirit of intersectionality.

Chapter 4 places the theoretical frameworks of Crenshaw, Derrida and Lorde alongside each other because they have a shared concern with intersectionality, and each offer theoretical approaches to the challenges of intersectionality. Thus, in terms of methodology, this chapter is an intersection of approaches to intersectionality. Lorde states that ‘...survival isn’t theoretical, we live it everyday [sic]’ (Greene, 1989:183). In order to better understand the lived experience of surviving the intersection of ‘...all the parts of who I am...’ (Lorde, 1980a:120) as a Black lesbian feminist, this chapter is a reflective, theoretical investigation into the psychological turmoil of the experience of the aporia of

intersectionality. Any attempt at a ‘psychic retreat’ (Steiner, 1993:1) from the ‘psychological toll’ (The Combahee River Collective, 1977:266) of aporia is merely to disavow the aporia.

This reflective inquiry has two primary objectives: firstly, to dismantle the conceptual structure of intersectionality to show that it is bound up with the aporia of hospitality and borders in an effort to contain the anxiety generated by the foreign stranger within me (Kristeva, 1991); and secondly, to examine how and why the intersection of selves that constitutes a self is so emotionally difficult.

In Chapter 5, the ‘Epilogue’ of Lorde’s (1996) biomythography, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, is used as a methodology to interrogate the aporia of positionality. Thus, the relationship between method and analysis within the structure of this possible re-reading of *Zami* mirrors the intersubjective, intertextual encounters that constitute the play of identity and difference in *Zami*. Using the space and place of the ‘Epilogue’ in *Zami*, this analysis examines the transgressive potential in the tension of simultaneously doing, and undoing, a position.

Chapter 5 examines the extent to which the creation of a biomythography provides a space for the resignification and function of identity categories. Picking up Beard’s (2009) concept of ‘acts of narrative resistance,’ I am interested in the ways that *Zami* confronts and argues with ‘the symbolic systems’ and ‘agency of codes’ (De Lauretis, 1984:3-4) that produce subjectivity, representation and self-representation.

Zami provides a rich, detailed genealogy of the struggles of being a Black lesbian in America in the 1950s. As such, I contend that *Zami* is an example of how Lorde anticipated, and is relevant to, current debates about the relationship between sexuality, race, diaspora (Wesling, 2008:30) and the transgressive potential of perversion (MacCormack, 2004:27-40). This chapter argues that contesting notions of author intention, the idea of a correct re-reading and ideas of the origin of the text provoke a re-thinking of the act of deciphering intention, origin and a correct (re-)reading of the activism of Black feminist theory.

In Chapter 6, I conclude with an examination of the position and function of theory within the current context of attacks on theory. I propose a re-reading of Anzaldúa's (2007) 'La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness' through Bion's (1959) psychoanalytic, theoretical lens of 'Attacks on Linking.' This chapter interrogates the dialectic of occupying theoretical frameworks as a site of subversion, whilst being mindful of Lorde's caution that '*...the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*' (Lorde, 1979b:112; emphasis in original). In order to reiterate the relevance of the activism of Lorde's work in particular, and the activism of Black feminist theory in general, this chapter provides a number of problematics that are alive in my engagement with Black feminist, grassroots activism. Ending on Jordan's (1978) question of, '*Where Is the Love?*,' the conclusion points to the challenges that this thesis opens up in relation to a rigorous and 'erotic' (Lorde, 1978a) commitment to the activism of Black feminist theory.

Chapter 2

‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’

Introduction

‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ is the opening sentence of Lorde’s essay, ‘Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface’ (Lorde, 1979a:60), first published in 1979 in the *Black Scholar* in response to *The Myth of Black Macho: A Response to Angry Black Feminists* by Staples (1979). Lorde critiques Staples’s work, outlining the ways in which the intersection of sexism with racism operates dynamics that separate Black women from Black men, and white women from Black women. This chapter deconstructs the complexity, implications and challenges embodied in the phrase, ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface.’ This re-reading of Lorde shows that ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ incorporates key themes, debates and issues central to feminism in general, and to the ‘...particular and legitimate issues which affect our lives as Black women...’ (Lorde, 1979a:60).

The relevance of re-reading ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ in relation to current and historical feminist debates is demonstrated in the following range of inquiries from both Black and white feminists. hooks asks the following questions:

Since men are not equals in white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class structure, which men do women want to be equal to? Do women share a common vision of what equality means? (hooks, 1984:18)

hooks continues:

As a black woman interested in feminist movement, I am often asked whether being black is more important than being a woman; whether feminist struggle to end sexist oppression is more important than the struggle to end racism and vice-versa. (hooks, 1984:29)

Indeed, Sojourner Truth at the 1851 Akron Women's Convention in Ohio was compelled to ask, 'Ain't I A Woman?' Hill Collins asks:

What criteria, if any, can be applied to ideas to determine whether they are in fact Black and feminist? What essential features does Black feminist thought share with other critical social theories, particularly Western feminist theory, Afrocentric theory, Marxist analyses, and postmodernism? (Hill Collins, 2000:18)

Suleri raises the question as to '...whether the signification of gendered race necessarily returns to the realism that it most seeks to disavow' (Suleri, 1992:253). Spivak makes the following contribution to the debate: 'The question is how to keep the ethnocentric Subject from establishing itself by selectively defining an Other' (Spivak, 1988:292). In terms of recent debates, Nash asks, '*who* is intersectional?' (Nash, 2008:9; emphasis in original) in terms of widening the debate beyond race and gender to incorporate '...an examination of identities that are imagined as either wholly or even partially privileged...' (Nash, 2008:10). Butler asks, 'If power works not merely to dominate or oppress existing subjects, but also to form subjects, what is this formation?' (Butler, 1997c:18). In terms of the concept of performativity, Butler comments:

I would therefore suggest that the question to ask is not whether the theory of performativity is transposable onto race, but what happens to the theory when it tries to come to grips with race. (Butler, 1999:xvi)

More generally, Bhabha asks, ‘How can the human world live its difference? how [sic] can a human being live Other-wise?’ (Bhabha, 1986:xxxvi).

The primary objectives of this chapter are, firstly, to address the issues raised in the questions above and to follow a line of inquiry that interrogates the following: what are the implications of ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ in relation to the subject formation of Black women? What are the implications of this statement in terms of how power operates to regulate and constitute different subjectivities? Is the Black subject’s psyche interpellated by power in a different way to the white subject’s psyche, and if so, how? (Butler, 1997c:5) Secondly, this chapter aims to trace the detail, performance and deployment of Lorde’s argument with specific reference to the collection of political essays and speeches in *Sister Outsider* (Lorde, 1984).

Epistemology Is Flattened

Alarcón troubles the idea that feminist thinking can rely on the reductionist premise of a shared experience of being a woman, stating that:

With gender as the central concept in feminist thinking, epistemology is flattened out in such a way that we lose sight of the complex and multiple ways in which the subject and object of possible experience are

constituted...There's no inquiry into the knowing subject beyond the fact of being a "woman." (Alarcón, 1990:361)

Lorde's statement that 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' both picks up and contests flattened out epistemology. The focus on race in Lorde's statement is an example of a factor that comprises the '...complex and multiple ways in which the subject and object of possible experience are constituted' (Alarcón, 1990:361). Alarcón's stress on multiple factors indicates that epistemology would do well to be constituted of the interaction between, rather than a separation of, a number of intersecting factors. It will become evident that the relationship between the subject and object of experience is fundamental to the reasons why 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface.' Lorde's intervention is a deliberate shift from emphasis on female subjectivity to a '...move beyond the existing frameworks by exposing the hidden, masculine, Eurocentric biases that structure binary thinking' (Keating, 1996:7).

Lorde's uses of the words 'Black' and 'blackface' invoke the visible regime of skin colour whilst refusing to fall foul of hierarchies of difference (Lorde, 1983b). Although refutation of hierarchal structures is fundamental to feminism, as reflected in collective-working and the quest to formulate feminist governance practices, the complexity of asserting the specificity of difference without succumbing to dominant hierarchical constructions is often absent (Ashcraft, 2001; Gray and Boddy, 2010; Hyde, 2000; Maier, 2008; McMillan, 2007). For example, Braidotti asserts that:

...redefinition of the female feminist subject is the notion of the asymmetry between the sexes, which results in the political and

epistemological project of asserting difference in a non-hierarchical manner... (Braidotti, 1991:281)

Stating the task and the requirements of the task for feminism, as Braidotti does here, is necessary, but it is clear from the persistence of hierarchies and the struggles with the issues of difference within feminism that we are a long way from developing ‘...political and epistemological project of asserting difference in a non-hierarchical manner...’ Analysis of ‘...the subject and object of possible experience...’ (Alarcón, 1990:361) cannot simply rest on the ‘asymmetry’ between men and women. The statement that ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ complicates the matter further, implying an ‘asymmetry’ between women that has to be accounted for. In relation to Sojourner Truth, Hill Collins writes:

Her question, “and ain’t I a woman?” points to the contradictions inherent in blanket use of the term *woman*...Rather than accepting the existing assumptions about what a woman is and then trying to prove that she fit the standards, Truth challenged the very standards themselves. Her actions demonstrate the process of deconstruction - namely, exposing a concept as ideological or culturally constructed rather than as natural or a simple reflection of reality. (Hill Collins, 2000:15; emphasis in original)

This chapter demonstrates that the claim that ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ challenges the ‘standards’ of what a woman is.

Constitutive Contexts

Detailed examination of what Lorde implies so concisely in her statement ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ opens up rich layers of complexity that are at the core of critical theory, feminist thinking, semiotics and literary criticism . Lorde questions not only the definition, but also the related methodology and epistemology mobilised in the construction of difference and multiple identities within the context of feminisms. In her paper, ‘Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,’ Lorde states that:

Thus, in a patriarchal power system where whiteness privilege is a major prop, the entrapments used to neutralize Black women and white women are not the same. (Lorde, 1980a:118)

Here, she is clear that the asymmetry between women is predicated upon the different ways that patriarchal power operates in regards to Black and white women. Pellegrini argues that:

...what starkly distinguishes “white” and “black” experiences of bodily self-consciousness, however, is their differential situation within the historico-psychical network of “race”...the push-pull between “what is real and what is psychical” is all the more jarring for subjects who must embody and signify the borderlands of dominant frames of reference. (Pellegrini, 1997:103)

Thus, Pellegrini points to the significance of context in the constitution of subjectivity and this chapter picks up on the role of context in subject formation. Indeed, it will be apparent from this re-reading of ‘Black feminism is not white

feminism in blackface’ that the context of the words within the statement itself reflects, and is performative of, the lived contexts in which feminisms are located. The point is that contexts are constitutive. Pellegrini implies that the context of a racist, homophobic patriarchy is experienced by different women in different ways because of the signifiers ‘Black’ and ‘white.’

This chapter demonstrates that the ‘entrapments’ in ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ infers much more than a binary Black and/or white division. What is suggested by the statement is much more than a response to lack of inclusion of Black feminists on the part of white feminists. Lorde is saying more than the fact that Black women are Other and Othered. Lorde is invoking the interdependency of difference, with the inherent political and epistemological problems, paradoxes and ambivalence of dependency and reliance on the Other, especially where there is a power differential. Butler interrogates the implications of interdependency in her statement that:

...when we think about who we “are” and seek to represent ourselves, we cannot represent ourselves as merely bounded beings, for the primary others who are past for me not only live on in the fibre of the boundary that contains me (one meaning of “incorporation”), but they also haunt the way I am, as it were, periodically undone and open to becoming unbounded. (Butler, 2004:28; parentheses in original)

Butler’s use of the words ‘bounded,’ ‘boundary’ and ‘unbounded,’ and Pellegrini’s (1997:103) reference to ‘borderlands of dominant frames of reference,’ provide clues to suggest that the issue of borders and boundaries are fundamental to understanding the reasons why ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface.’ Currie (2004:3) comments that ‘...the identity of things,

people, places, groups, nations and cultures is constituted by the logics of both sameness and difference.’ The point here, in the context of ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface,’ is that the boundary of each word, each category and the meaning of each term is contested.

Black Feminism without White Feminism?

‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ provokes questions such as: would there be Black feminism without white feminism? Would there be white feminism without Black feminism? In the context of racist assumed white supremacy, would it make sense to reconfigure the statement to say, ‘white feminism is not Black feminism in whiteface’? Can there be feminism without the prefix of Black and white? How do the signifiers ‘Black’ and ‘white’ function? In the short story, *Recitatif*, Morrison experimented with:

...the removal of all racial codes from a narrative about two characters of different races for whom racial identity is crucial. (Morrison, 1992:xi)

Seshadri-Crooks analyses *Recitatif* to ask:

When the signifier “black” or “white” points to a specific body, what have we discovered about it? Is there some knowledge, something that we know, due to the function of the signifier? (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000a:148)

The problem is how to maintain the ‘crucial’ in relation to racial identity, which differentiates Black feminism from white feminism, whilst wrestling with the inherent paradoxes, ambivalence and lack of interdependency. A particular difficulty lies in the process of identification. If the basis for identification is in relation to the ‘Other,’ and if for Black feminisms the Other is white feminisms,

and vice-versa, then both the relationality and the interdependency are paradoxical on a cognitive level, but intensely uncomfortable on an emotional level. Bhabha explains that:

...to be different from those that are different makes you the same – that the Unconscious speaks of the form of Otherness, the tethered shadow of deferral and displacement. It is not the Colonialist Self or the Colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness... (Bhabha, 1986, in Fanon, 2008: xxviii).

Tolerance: The Grossest Reformism

hooks' comment that '...it is unlikely that women would join feminist movement simply because we are biologically the same' (hooks, 1984:24) opens up the issues of ownership and identification in relation to feminism, and questions the '...foundation on which to construct theory or engage in overall meaningful praxis' (hooks, 1984:17) that feminism is based on. Moreover, both Lorde and hooks are pushing for a 'meaningful praxis' which moves beyond '...the grossest reformism' of '[a]dvocating the mere tolerance of difference between women...'. (Lorde, 1979b:111). Lorde is suspicious of the idea that '[t]he pronouncement "I am a tolerant man" conjures seemliness, propriety, forbearance, magnanimity, cosmopolitanism, universality, and the large view...' (Brown, 2008:178). It would appear that her suspicion is well-founded. The Latin root of tolerance is 'tolero,' derived from the Greek verb 'talao,' meaning 'to bear' and 'to endure,' invoking a moral and power differential that positions that which endures and that which has to be endured. Brown (2008) picks up three particular angles presented in the Oxford English Dictionary's definition:

(1) “the action or practice of *enduring* pain or hardship”; (2) “the action of *allowing*; license, permission granted by an authority”; and (3) “the *disposition to be patient with or indulgent* to the opinions or practices of others...” (Brown, 2008:25; emphasis in original).

It would seem, then, that liberal discourses of ‘tolerance’ rest on constructions that solidify, rather than dismantle, power differentials. Brown’s detailed examination of the function of tolerance argues that the ‘...Manichean rhetorical scheme...’ (Brown, 2008:190) within the discourse and practice of tolerance to make the unknown known, relies on a codification of differences into hierarchicalized binaries of ‘...“fundamentalist/intolerant/unfree”...’ on the one side, and “...pluralist/tolerant/free” on the other...’ (Brown, 2008:190).

Application of this analysis of tolerance to ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ signals a warning that any relationship between differences within feminism cannot rest on differences being tolerated. Any ‘...hierarchicalized opposites’ (Brown, 2008:189) of ‘Black feminism is not white feminism’ is disrupted by ‘in blackface.’ This disruption indicates that the task is so much more complicated than the binary of an either/or position of it ‘is’ and ‘is not.’ Brown’s critical analysis of tolerance explains the complexity of how:

Political and civic tolerance, then, emerges when a group difference that poses a challenge to the definitions or binding features of the whole must be incorporated but also must be sustained as a difference: regulated, managed, controlled.’ (Brown, 2008:71)

‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ asserts Black feminism’s refusal to be incorporated into white feminism, whilst asserting the specificity of

difference in its own terms rather than any prescribed sustaining of difference. What is clear both from the fact of having to articulate that ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ and from this exploration into the function of tolerance is that the ‘...group difference...’ (Brown, 2008:71) of Black feminism poses a challenge.

The Yardstick of Fictive Universality

Butler asks a number of related questions:

Is there some commonality among “women” that pre-exists their oppression, or do “women” have a bond by virtue of their oppression alone? (Butler, 2008:5)

Is the construction of the category of women as a coherent and stable subject an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations? And is not such a reification precisely contrary to feminist aims? (Butler, 2008:7)

Butler’s use of the words ‘commonality,’ ‘bond,’ ‘coherent,’ ‘stable’ and ‘unwitting regulation and reification’ question ‘...the shortcut to a categorical or fictive universality of the structure of domination, held to produce women’s common subjugated experience’ (Butler, 2008:5). Lorde approaches the appeal of a ‘fictive universality’ in terms of:

...our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation. [...] Too often, we pour the energy needed for recognizing and exploring difference into pretending those differences are insurmountable barriers, or that they do not exist at all.

This results in a voluntary isolation, or false and treacherous connections.
(Lorde, 1980a:115)

Both Butler and Lorde caution that the ‘fictive,’ ‘pretending,’ ‘false’ and ‘misnaming’ strategies of denial, exclusion and foreclosure are the requirements for a claim of universalism. The caution needs to be accompanied with the added caution of the dangers of using terms like ‘pretending,’ ‘misnaming,’ ‘false’ and ‘fictive’ to propose, and thereby, fall into the trap of binary positions, the existence of a ‘true,’ a ‘real’ and an ‘authentic.’ In her 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, Butler revises her understanding of:

...the claim of “universality” in exclusive negative and exclusionary terms [...] to understand how the assertion of universality can be proleptic and performative, conjuring a reality that does not yet exist, and holding out the possibility for a convergence of cultural horizons that have not yet met.
(Butler, 1999:xviii)

Lorde’s basis for hope is expressed:

...within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters.
(Lorde, 1979b:111)

This statement presents quite a challenge; change is contingent upon epistemology which, according to Butler, ‘...does not yet exist...’ (Butler, 1999:xviii). The challenge of the interdependency of difference is the task of grappling with the different entrapments used in the ‘psychic life of power’ (Butler, 1997c) to

neutralise Black and white women without charters. Mohanty's (1984) paper, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,' addresses the strategies, mechanisms and structures in which:

...the application of the notion of women as a homogeneous category to women in the Third World colonizes and appropriates the pluralities of the simultaneous location of different groups of women in social class and ethnic frameworks; in doing so it ultimately robs them of their historical and political agency. (Mohanty, 1984:39)

Mohanty goes on to add:

In other words, Western feminist discourse, by assuming women as a coherent, already constituted group that is placed in kinship, legal, and other structures, defines Third World women as subjects outside social relations, instead of looking at the way women are constituted through these very structures. (Mohanty, 1984:40)

Mohanty is saying that the assumption that Black women are a stable, 'coherent' group is a construction produced out of a particular set of conditions and power relations that must be taken account of. Spivak (1988) adds further layers of complexity:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the "third-world woman" caught between tradition and modernization. (Spivak, 1988:306)

Both Mohanty and Spivak are keen to impress the significance of the production of construction of 'third-world woman' and what the construction goes on to produce. Both Mohanty and Spivak are highlighting the specificity of the entrapments used to neutralize Black women and indicate that ideology produces Black women as an 'already constituted group' (Mohanty, 1984:40). The 'already' functions as an entrapment that forecloses and constrains critical analysis. This chapter contends that 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' because of the specificity of the entrapments and goes on to scrutinise the 'sly civility' (Bhabha, 1994:93) of these entrapments. Mohanty reflects that:

...I am trying to uncover how ethnocentric universalism is produced in certain analyses. As a matter of fact, my argument holds for any discourse that sets up its own authorial subjects as the implicit referent, that is, the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural others. It is in this move that power is exercised in discourse. (Mohanty, 1984:21)

This chapter deconstructs the 'authorial subjects,' 'implicit referent' and 'yardstick' that 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' is contingent upon. The tension is in the stating of a position in order to undo a position. The challenge for Black feminism lies in its resistance to being seduced into replicating the 'authorial subjects,' 'implicit referent' and 'yardstick' (Mohanty, 1984:21) embodied in the 'claim to authenticity' (Suleri, 1992:251).

'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' goes to the heart of fundamental questions concerning the basis, membership, definition and aim of feminism. The statement provokes questions of: who and what is foreclosed? Who is constituted, in what ways and why? Butler asks:

What kinds of agency are foreclosed through the positing of an epistemological subject precisely because the rules and practices that govern the invocation of that subject and regulate its agency in advance are ruled out as sites of analysis and critical intervention? (Butler, 2006:197)

This close re-reading of 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' picks up elements of Butler's question in relation to the foreclosure and regulation, not only of agency, but also of analysis and critical intervention of the rules and practices that position Black feminism in relation to white feminism. Butler exposes the temporal trick of the 'in advance' that functions to rule out subversive ideas. In other words, and to pick up on the point made earlier, the impetus to examine an 'already constituted group' (Mohanty, 1984:40) may be less than the impetus to examine that which is new and unfamiliar. Chapter 3, 'An Analysis and Application of "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power"' provides further exploration of the function of the 'always already' and the 'prior.'

In transgressing the 'already' and in destabilizing the 'in advance,' Lorde's statement that 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' embodies and performs its own deconstruction. Butler explains this dynamic in the following way:

The deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated. (Butler, 2006:203)

Therefore, 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' '...establishes as political the very terms through which...' Black feminism is articulated and identified.

In thinking about the '...sites of analysis and critical intervention' that '...are ruled out...' (Butler, 2006:197), for Bacchi, the primary issue is not one of sameness or difference, but:

...the question becomes: why has this "difference" been constructed as disadvantage? If women are in fact the "same", the problem of their relative disadvantage and lack of power remains unresolved. There is a need therefore to shift the focus of analysis from the "difference" to the structures which convert this "difference" into disadvantage. (Bacchi, 1990:xviii, cited in Currie, 2004:88).

Juxtaposing Butler's and Bacchi's line of inquiry, it could be argued that the positing of epistemology of women as the 'same' forecloses the play of unequal power differentials. This happens because the 'structures,' 'rules and practices' that 'govern,' 'convert' and 'regulate' 'difference into disadvantage' are ruled out. Critical intervention would include a shift in the charter and convergence of cultural horizons, asking different questions and re-working the primary issue of sameness and difference.

The 'not'

'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' is not simply referring to sameness and difference; to use the words of Bacchi, Lorde '...shift[s] the focus...' (Bacchi, 1990:xviii, cited in Currie, 2004:88). Lorde not only troubles the notion of a shared feminism, but she introduces the 'not.' In 'Black feminism is not,' the distinction between Black feminism and white feminism is made available by the 'not.' This should not be confused with fixed, oppositional, essentialist categories of Black and white. Brah explains that:

...they are fields of contestation inscribed within discursive and material processes and practices in a post-colonial terrain. They represent struggles over political frameworks for analysis; the meanings of theoretical concepts; the relationship between theory, practice and subjective experiences, and over political priorities and modes of mobilisation. But they should not, in my view, be understood as constructing "white" and "black" women as "essentially" fixed oppositional categories. (Brah, 1996:110)

In the statement under analysis in this chapter, the order of the words 'Black feminism' 'is not' 'white feminism' 'in' 'blackface' opens up a site of critical analysis and intervention to interrogate the performative racist configuration in which white is primary, first, an instigator with agency to colonise. Butler's definition of performativity brings together the embodiment of agency, rules, practices and epistemology. Butler explains that:

...performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body,

understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration. (Butler, 1999:xv)

Here, Butler's explanation of performativity provides a set of tools for critical analysis. The critical lens of performativity brings into focus both the temporal and the spatial dimensions of naturalization, and significantly, Butler points to the body as representative and the site of the effects of performativity. In other words, the corporeal surface of 'blackface' is inscribed with, and ritually re-inscribed through, a series of acts that seek to produce a fixed identity. In using 'blackface,' Lorde deliberately troubles the signification of 'Black feminism.'

It is in the 'repetition' that a space for re-signification opens up because each act of repetition refers and defers to the next. It is in the temporal and spatial instability of reiteration that the political imperatives of the activism of Black feminism can be asserted. Each time the names 'Black feminism' and 'white feminism' are communicated - whether by the speech act (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969, 1975) or within text - its meaning, identification and understanding shifts. Probyn (2003:294) puts it succinctly: '...the space and place we inhabit produce us.' In other words, the production of Black and white feminism is relative to space and place, and since we all inhabit different physical, geographical, social, economic, emotional and ideological spaces and places, it follows that different feminisms will be produced.

The Politics of Location

Reframed as a series of questions relevant to this particular chapter, the significance of Probyn's words could be translated as: how do Black and white women inhabit different space and places? Is Black and white subjectivity produced differently, and if so, how and why? Is 'Black feminism not white feminism in blackface' because the space and place that produces Black subjectivity is not the space and place that produces white subjectivity? How is the Black subject situated? The semantic space and place of the words in 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' embodies, constitutes and performs what Probyn calls '...relations of proximity' that 'highlights the facts of connection or dis/connection' (Probyn, 2003:294).

Radhakrishnan's elaboration of the concept of 'diasporic location' has relevance here:

Locations are as factual as they are imaginary and imagined, as physical as they are psychic, and as open to direct experience as they are to empathic participation...locations are never simple but rather multilayered realities overdetermined by diverse cultural and political flows. (Radhakrishnan, 2000:56)

Radhakrishnan continues with the explanation incorporating Butler's concept of performativity, and Probyn's relation of inhabitancy and production:

The politics of location is productive...because it makes one location vulnerable to the claims of another and enables multiple contested readings of the one reality from a variety of locations and

positions...unless the many mediations that interpellate location are studied in all their interconnectedness, locational analyses will be no more than exercises in defensive self-absorption. (Radhakrishnan, 2000:56-57).

Thus, the location of (B)black and white in 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' is as important as the words themselves. Indeed, location mediates and produces meaning, and becomes a site of either appropriation or resistance.

Both the spaces between the words in 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' and the relation of one word to the other are performative of the relationality of intersubjectivity. The configuration of the words is representative of the configuration of the Black subject in relation to the white subject, and Black feminism in relation to white feminism. Thus, the 'shift in focus' that Bacchi called for earlier in this chapter could be a shift from the words themselves to the interdependency of words. The 'not' is only the 'not' in relation to what it actually is, or the opposite of 'not.' The claim of what Black feminism 'is not' is contingent upon a notion of what Black feminism 'is.' The danger here is of predicating the 'not' on a claim of authenticity. However, a close re-reading of the use of the 'not' in 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' appears to invoke an authenticity of Black feminism. This could be an example of an intervention of the '*...strategic use of positivist essentialism...*' (Spivak, 2006:281; emphasis in original) in order to guard against misrecognition of 'white feminism in blackface.' The challenge for Black feminism lies in the problematic of establishing coherence, and a sense of what Black feminism stands for when all

representations are unstable and relational, whilst keeping hold of the political imperative of suspecting a masquerade or misrecognition.

The Problem of the 'Native Informant'

Mohanty adds further complexity to the debate, stating that:

If relations of domination and exploitation are defined in terms of binary divisions - groups that dominate and groups that are dominated - then surely the implication is that the accession to power of women as a group is sufficient to dismantle the existing organization of relations. But women as a group are not in some sense essentially superior or infallible. The crux of the problem lies in that initial assumption of women as a homogeneous group.... (Mohanty, 1984:39)

The premise that unequal gender relations bind women together in a shared feminist discourse, and the assumption that women are a homogeneous group, are contested. However, the temptation to form factions or impose a ranking of whose difference or whose group is more or less oppressed (Lorde, 1983b:219-220) function to replicate existing power relations and result in '...a simple inversion of what exists' (Mohanty, 1984:39). Bhabha (1994) poses a number of relevant questions:

Must we always polarize in order to polemicize? Are we trapped in a politics of struggle where the representation of social antagonisms and historical contradictions can take no other form than a binarism of theory vs politics? Can the aim of freedom of knowledge be the simple inversion

of the relation of oppressor and oppressed, centre and periphery, negative image and positive image? (Bhabha, 1994:19)

hooks (1984) makes several points that are pertinent to this discussion. hooks names and exposes strategies used to flatten out epistemology and used to posit the 'already constituted' epistemological subject of Black women:

...the slogan "the personal is political"... became a means of encouraging women to think that the experience of discrimination, exploitation, or oppression automatically corresponded with an understanding of the ideological and institutional apparatus shaping one's social status [...] When women internalized the idea that describing their own woe was synonymous with developing a critical political consciousness, the progress of feminist movement was stalled. (hooks, 1984:24-25)

hooks argues that an aspect of the stalling serves to re-inscribe the '...hegemonic dominance of white academic women' (hooks, 1984:30) and privileges the claim of giving voice to Black, poor, marginalised women at the expense of creating an inclusive developing theory. The consequences of this include the invocation of marginalised women in feminism on the basis of their '..."experiential" work, personal life stories' (hooks, 1984:30). hooks concludes that: 'Personal experiences are important to feminist movement but they cannot take the place of theory' (hooks, 1984:30). The issue that hooks is flagging up here is that to position experience in the place of theory serves to freeze the Black subject into a fixed, essentialist position. This serves as a basis for an authenticity that, by definition, is divorced from the tools of critical analysis. Smith prefers:

...the formulation “theorizing black feminisms” to the deceptive and monolithic category “black feminist theory.” The participial phrase calls attention to the process and activity of doing specific kinds of work in the name of black feminism... (Smith, 1998:xix)

In other words, the activism of Black feminist theory cannot be contained and constrained within the border of a singularity, whether that be the singularity of experience, identity categories or theory. Spivak’s reference to the problem of the ‘Native Informant’ as ‘truth’ resonates with hook’s critique of feminism:

If one looks at the history of post-Enlightenment theory, the major problem has been the problem of autobiography: how subjective structures can, in fact, give objective truth. During these same centuries, the Native Informant...was unquestioningly treated as the objective evidence for the founding of so-called sciences...So that, once again, the theoretical problems only relate to the person who knows. The person who *knows* has all of the problems of selfhood. The person who is *known*, somehow seems not to have a problematic self. (Spivak, 1986:66; emphasis in original)

Thus, the use of autobiographical foundations for ‘knowing’ is beset with problems, not least, that of positing an epistemological subject on the basis of privileging claims of a decided personhood. The relevance of these points to ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ is that Lorde is both positing and troubling a *knowing* of what it means to be Black. She straddles the dialectic of positing that the selfhood of race is relational, whilst functioning to maintain differences.

The Constitutive Interstices of Feminisms

The importance of process in the dialectic articulated above is emphasised by Bhabha:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. (Bhabha, 1994:1)

Here, Bhabha contests the very existence of an 'originary and initial' subjectivity as part of the dialectic of difference. He proposes that energy should be not be directed towards the location of 'originary and initial subjectivities,' but, rather, towards dismantling process and production. For Bhabha, theoretical engagement requires '...the emergence of the interstices - the overlap and displacement of domains of difference...' (Bhabha, 1994:2).

The configuration of 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' directs attention to the interstices that constitute different feminisms. Lorde is indicating that there is a space between Black and white feminism and that the space matters. The issue is that of what happens to the 'personal experiences,' description of 'woes' and 'personal life stories' that hooks (1984:24-25 and 30) refers to within Bhabha's (1994:2) inevitable interstices.

This is further complicated by the notion of Black women as migratory subjects who occupy '...that in-between space that is neither here nor there...' (Boyce Davies, 1994:1). However, rather than intervening to fix or stabilise Black feminism in the in-between space, an intervention used for the purposes of

taking hold of, and appropriating, Black feminism, in contrast, emancipatory approaches need to ‘...activate the term “Black” relationally, provisionally and based on location or position’ (Boyce Davies, 1994:8). It could be argued that the construction and use of the statement ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ anticipates many of the arguments found in postmodernist, deconstructionist theory concerning positionality, relationality and contestations of an originary. Boyce Davies makes this point in relation to Black feminist scholarship in general:

My contention is that postmodernist positions or feminist positions are always already articulated by Black women because we experience, ahead of the general population, many of the multiple struggles that subsequently become popularly expressed (for example, drugs in communities, teen pregnancies, struggle for control of one’s body, one’s labor, etc.). Black feminist criticisms, then, perhaps more than many of the other feminisms, can be a praxis where the theoretical positions and the criticism interact with the lived experience. (Boyce Davies, 1994:55)

The subject of experience emerges again here. However, Boyce Davies offers an example of using experience not to displace, but to interact with theory, thereby using experience as a vital element in the process of formulating theory, rather than positioning experience in the place of theory. It could be argued that ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ because of the interaction of experience with theory. The experiences of Black women are different to the experiences of white women in the context of a racist, homophobic patriarchy.

Turning to Foucault's (1972) work on 'discontinuity as history,' Radhakrishnan comments:

Foucault's brilliant notion of *dans le vrai* sums up this notion of truth in history as a matter of spatial subjection. [...] Hence the need in Foucault to "think a different history" and to write the history of the present that requires different tools, different strategies, and a different sense of space...a historical project of imagining different spaces for different histories and knowledges that have been subjugated... (Radhakrishnan, 2000:60-61; italics in original).

'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' invites interrogation of the history and constitution of feminisms. It would appear that using the tools, strategies and space that enable subjugated knowledges arising out of 'spatial subjection' to be excavated will help in the task.

Intersectionality

An example of how multiple, connected axes of identity in the locus, spatial temporality of personal life stories is grappled with can be found in the theory of intersectionality. Intersectionality, first coined by Crenshaw in 1989, has been defined as '...the notion that identity is formed by interlocking and mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class and sexuality...' (Nash, 2008:3). Crenshaw disrupted notions of adding and subtracting or a hierarchical ranking of categories of oppression, demonstrating that the 'intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism' (Crenshaw, 1989:140). The theory of

intersectionality born out of an analysis of Black women's lived experience of multiple discrimination, and the refusal of the U.S. legal system to recognise this, has particular relevance to this chapter. Crenshaw illustrates that the basis upon which Black women presented their case before the legal courts was not the basis upon which white women or black men presented their cases of gender and racial discrimination before the court. These Black women presented their cases of discrimination on the basis of the intersection of being both Black and female. Thus, the entrapments used in relation to Black women have specificity in their own right that has to be accounted for.

The complexity of the task of intersectionality is explored in this thesis in Chapter 4, 'The Aporotics of Intersectionality' and is articulated here by Radhakrishnan:

Each of these lived realities, such as the ethnic, the diasporic, the gay, the migrant, the subaltern, etc., must imagine its own discursive-epistemic space as a form of openness to one another's persuasion: neither totalized oppression... (Radhakrishnan, 2000:61)

The challenge Radhakrishnan presents here in relation to 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' is that of understanding the particularity of lived realities that constitutes Black feminism whilst resisting the urge to totalize. Brah cautions that the '*...strategic use of positivist essentialism...*' (Spivak, 2006:281; emphasis in original) can lead to a situation where 'one form of oppression leads to the reinforcement of another.' Rather, Brah advocates for '*...strategies for challenging all oppressions on the basis of an understanding of how they interconnect and articulate*' (Brah, 1996:126).

The interdependency, interconnections and intersections of multiple forms of oppression as a basis for feminist activism will only be effective if they are allowed to remain open to each other. Arguing against a unitary representation and fixed hierarchy, Bhabha comments that:

...the transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are *neither the One* (unitary working class) *nor the Other* (the politics of gender) *but something else besides*, which contests the terms and territories of both. (Bhabha, 1994:28; emphasis in original)

‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ resists a bolted on, cumulative configuration of multiple identity and invites a particular scrutiny of ‘subjugated knowledges’ (Hill Collins, 2000:252) of ‘the matrix of domination’ (Hill Collins, 2000:228). Drawing on her own experience, Lorde explains that:

As a Black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identity, and a woman committed to racial and sexual freedom from oppression, I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. (Lorde, 1980a:120)

The mechanisms used to encourage the eclipsing of multiple aspects of Black women’s identity and experience may not present as obvious or explicit. The subtle and even unwitting encouragement to pluck out one aspect of Black women’s identity to formulate a stable, coherent ‘whole’ would be tantamount to using the ‘...*master’s tools* [to] *dismantle the master’s house*...’ (Lorde, 1979b:112; emphasis in original), and as such will fail.

Examination of Black women located within ‘...complex spaces of multiple meanings’ (Nash, 2008:8) is anything but neat and straightforward. Nash speaks of the need ‘...to grapple with intersectionality’s theoretical, political, and methodological murkiness...’ (Nash, 2008:1). However, the ‘murkiness’ is not an excuse for reductionist, satisfactory formulations that provide solutions to difficult issues. Rather, the ‘murkiness’ should and will remain murky. Instead of being foreclosed, this murky quality of intersectionality could be used for productive thinking that may not necessarily summon up solutions. Indeed, ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ opens up, rather than resolves, the complexity of issues and questions that it gives rise to.

Injurious Interpellations

The particular issue this chapter addresses concerns the notion of the ‘psychic life of power’ (Butler, 1997c). Questions in relation to the ‘psychic life of power’ and the interdependency of the specificity of Black feminism with white feminism could include: How does the ‘psychic life of power’ inhabit, and obtain agency through, the intersection of multiple axes of identity and power relations? Is ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ because the ‘psychic life of power’ interpellates the Black psyche differently than the white psyche? In regards to these questions, Probyn offers a particularly relevant observation: ‘...we are interpellated differently: that we are hailed by different ideologies in different ways...’ (Probyn, 2003: 298). Here, Probyn indicates that the space and place Black women inhabit hails and interpellates Black women differently to white women. The ideologies propagated within a racist, homophobic patriarchy

hail Black and white subjects differently. The specific mechanisms used in the interpellation of Black subjectivity are explored by a range of Black feminist scholars (Amos and Parmar, 1984; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1982; Mirza, 1997). Keizer's (2004) use of Althusser's theory of interpellation to interpret Morrison's (1987) *Beloved* is a good example of this particular line of inquiry. Keizer examines Morrison's:

...explicit concern with the mechanisms - coercive and consensual - that slaveholders used to construct and control black men and women call to mind Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation... (Keizer, 2004:13)

Taking up these issues in 'An Open Letter to Mary Daly,' Lorde speaks frankly and with powerful directness:

To imply, however, that all women suffer the same oppression simply because we are women is to lose sight of the many and varied tools of patriarchy. It is to ignore how these tools are used by women without awareness against each other. (Lorde, 1979c:67)

In the same letter Lorde concludes that '... beyond sisterhood is still racism' (Lorde, 1979c:70).

The issue at the heart of 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' that concerns all feminisms is whether there can be a feminist movement and theory that doesn't replicate, or become, a simple inversion of binary divisions, tolerance, regulation and reification. Thieme's caution about the potential effect of postcolonial theory functioning as a 'straitjacket,' shackle or an occlusion is applicable here:

...the term “postcolonial”, which initially promised liberation from some of the hegemonic assumptions of the Western academy, has itself threatened to become a straitjacket, shackling or occluding the differences that exist amid the particular creative energies of the many peoples, places and agendas it has subsumed into its project. (Thieme, 2001:6)

Throughout *Sister Outsider*, Lorde continually addresses the issue of how to think about the position, and positioning, of intersubjectivity without inverting existing power relations.

In the following quotation, Lorde questions the ‘terms of oppression’ that constitute the ‘ticket’ to move from the position of being ‘outside’ to ‘inside’ the ‘fold’:

What woman here is so enamoured of her own oppression that she cannot see her heelprint upon another woman’s face? What woman’s terms of oppression have become precious and necessary to her as a ticket into the fold of the righteous, away from the cold winds of self-scrutiny? (Lorde, 1981:132)

A close re-reading of Lorde’s words, in conjunction with Butler’s (1997c) analysis of *The Psychic Life of Power*, enables a nuanced exploration of the mechanisms and impetus that Lorde is referring to. In answer to the question of, ‘What woman’s terms of oppression have become precious and necessary to her?’ (Lorde, 1981:132), Butler might respond:

Called by an injurious name, I come into social being, and because I have certain inevitable attachment to my existence, because a certain narcissism

takes hold of any term that confers existence, I am led to embrace the terms that injure me because they constitute me socially. (Butler, 1997c:104)

Both Lorde and Butler take up the idea of damage and harm conjured in the reference to ‘injury’ and the image of the ‘heelprint’ on another woman’s face. Indeed, Butler speaks of ‘...those injurious interpellations...’ (Butler, 1997c:104). Lorde and Butler make similar claims; the ‘narcissism’ of being ‘so enamoured by her own oppression’ to ‘embrace the terms that injure me’ is fuelled by the impulse or desire to ‘embrace’ become ‘so enamoured’ as to ‘take hold of any term,’ ‘precious and necessary.’

Lorde’s warning is addressed to all women; she makes no distinction in terms of colour, class, sexuality or brand of feminism, and her warning is that the ‘psychic life of power’ is able to mobilise the effect of both being ‘so enamoured’ and the ‘inevitable attachment.’

Bringing in the component of desire and attachment underscores the need for rigorous vigilance on the part of Black and white feminists in order to resist insidious, oppressive forces of stability, inclusion and acceptance in the face of racist, homophobic patriarchal rejections and exclusions. Butler explains that:

...the attachment to subjection is produced through the workings of power, and that part of the operation of power is made clear in this psychic effect, one of the most insidious of its productions. (Butler, 1997c:6)

Ahmed also takes up the question of the function and relationship of attachment to power:

...how do such attachments to feminism relate to attachments that already exist in the everyday world, including those that are bound up with the reproduction of the very forms of power that feminism seeks to contest. [sic] (Ahmed 2004:171)

In relation to the 'terms' Lorde refers to in the passage quoted earlier, she is identifying the insidious, plausible binary positions of precious/not precious, necessary/unnecessary, righteous/unrighteous that will ultimately result in Mohanty's '...inversion of what exists' (Mohanty, 1984:39).

The Performative Regime of Visibility

'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' invokes the performative regime of visibility. Seshadri-Crooks' (2000a) detailed examination of the function and meaning of visibility, the looking and seeing in racism, underscores the significance of Lorde's uses of 'Black' and 'white.' Seshadri-Crooks clarifies her theoretical approach:

Thus by visibility I refer to a regime of looking that thrives on "major" and "minor" details in order to shore up one's symbolic position...I therefore focus on race as a practice of visibility...My premise is that the regime of visibility secures the investment that we make in "race," and there are good reasons why such an investment cannot be easily surrendered. (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000a:2)

'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' invokes a relationship between the regime of visibility and that which is included and

excluded. Thus, in the statement ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface,’ the word ‘feminism’ is a potential although contested site of inclusion, but being ‘Black’ or ‘white’ is a potential site for exclusion.

This complex relationship of difference is examined by Seshadri-Crooks, who claims that ‘[r]ace is fundamentally a regime of looking’ (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000a:2) and that:

By Whiteness, I refer to a master signifier (without a signified) that establishes a structure of relations, a signifying chain that through a process of inclusions and exclusions constitutes a pattern for organizing human difference. This chain provides subjects with certain symbolic positions such as “black,” “white,”... We will therefore have to see how this symbolic structuration is related to visibility. (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000a:3-4; parentheses in original)

In ‘What’s in a name?...’ (2000a), Seshadri-Crooks uses Butler’s deconstruction of gender as a category of representation, identity and identification to interrogate:

What does it mean to point with the noun “black” or “white”... What kind of words are these? Do they possess a meaning, or connote a concept, that remains identical with itself in all situations, or do their predicates determine the meaning of these words, thus making subject and predicate synonymous with each other? Is there any “sense” to naming someone black or white? (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000a: 137)

These questions and, indeed, the whole of Seshadri-Crooks chapter, ‘What’s in a name?...’ are relevant to ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’

because of the critical examinations of gender and race, performativity, and deceptions of coherence, unity and stability in identity categories. Furthermore, Seshadri-Crooks' (2000a) analysis provides a critical, theoretical microscope through which to scrutinise the categories of 'Black' and 'white.' Seshadri-Crooks articulates the complexity of the task that could be applied not only to this particular close re-reading of Lorde's statement, but to the activism of Black and white feminist theories:

If one begins from the perspective of power as the ultimate productive force in the construction of categories - binary, monologic or differential - then one's task is usually focussed on exposing the sandy bottom of power's foundational pretensions. One's critical task, to put it rather reductively, is to eliminate the modality of necessity and install in its place the contingency of all relations. (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000a:136)

Drawing a clear parallel with the rigidity and limitations of gender identity categories already explored in this chapter, Seshadri-Crooks concludes that:

Racial identity, too, I would like to suggest - i.e., words like black and white, when used as nouns - works like names. That is, they are rigid designators - they are signifiers that have no signified. [...] it may be more productive to view racial color designators as operating not unlike proper names. The proper name is nether wholly one's own (i.e., we are all named by others) nor is it meaningful. [...] No set of qualitative descriptions can establish black or white identity across all possible worlds, but we cannot therefore say that black and white do not exist... (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000a:141; parentheses in original)

The key is not in the noun(s), but in the enquiry into the contingencies of ‘all relations,’ or the enquiry into the mechanisms of the ‘psychic life of power’ mediated through identity designators. Seshadri-Crooks proposes a Lacanian analysis which foregrounds unconscious anxiety of the lack and incompleteness that constitute desire for whiteness or the promise of wholeness:

...racial naming as referring to properties (or the stereotype) acts as an envelope, a cover for the anxiety of racial reference which literally means nothing...There is something anxiety-producing about the fullness of the signifier/referent relation that bypasses the signified, or the concept, that would properly produce meaning and thus desire. (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000a:143; parentheses in original)

In relation to the application of this Lacanian analysis of the lack to the realm of feminist activism and theory, Spivak observes that:

Clearly, if you are poor, black and female you get it in three ways. If, however, this formulation is moved from the first-world context into the postcolonial (which is not identical with the third-world) context, the description “black” or “of color” loses persuasive significance. The necessary stratification of colonial subject-constitution in the first phase of capitalist imperialism makes “color” useless as an emancipator signifier. (Spivak, 1988: 294; parentheses in original)

Clearly, the issue of context, whether that be ‘capitalist imperialism’ or the place of the ‘envelope’ (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000a:143) used to contain anxiety, is crucial. Similarly, the place of Black feminism in relation to white feminism in Lorde’s statement that ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ is crucial.

‘blackface’

Of all the different premises available to distinguish Black feminism from white feminism, Lorde rests her case on ‘blackface,’ and as such, draws on, and opens up, a range of images, connotations and inferences. This chapter follows up on the inference to mimicry invoked in the word ‘blackface.’ As already seen, Mohanty, hooks and Hill Collins are amongst many Black feminist scholars who warn against the mimicry of inversion. Black feminists caution against the false and treacherous connections of fictive feminist universalities, and the unwitting regulation and reification of a feminism based solely on gender.

Lorde’s gaze on ‘blackface’ plays with the shifting, contradictory, racist genre of minstrelsy. Blackface minstrelsy used slapstick, stump speech, and romanticised and exaggerated stereotypes. These strategies can be seen in the Black slave, caricatured by the following figures: Jim Crow; the Black servant; the mammy; the dandy, represented by Zip Coon; and the mulatto wench who personified the exoticised sexual promiscuity of Black women embodied in light-skinned, Caucasian features (Toll, 1974). Lott’s study of the social and psychological function of blackface minstrelsy illustrates that the acting out of the grotesque, animalistic, infantilisation of Black people provided a vehicle for the projective identifications of white audiences (Lott, 1993:143-148). The performative juxtaposition of figures such as Tambo and Mr Bones reiterated racist power dynamics. The dynamics of embodied simple mindedness in the ersatz form of Black vernacular English, with the blackface interlocutor representative of educated sophistication in the voice of aristocratic English, functioned to heightened and re-inscribed unequal power differentials. The performance also encompassed the paradox of the ‘...conflictual economy of

colonial discourse...’ (Bhabha, 1994:85). Lorde’s reference to ‘blackface’ provocatively invokes and conflates the conscious and unconscious associations of black and white signifiers mediated through genres such as black minstrelsy, simultaneously conjuring Bhabha’s mimicry, sly civility and hybridity of ‘...the “not quite/not white”...’ (Bhabha, 1994:92).

Mimicry

Bhabha defines mimicry as:

...the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.* (Bhabha, 1994:86; emphasis in original)

It is in the ‘...area between mimicry and mockery...’ (Bhabha, 1994:86) or in the ‘not’ in ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ that:

‘...mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference’ (Bhabha, 1994:86; emphasis in original).

The ‘not in blackface’ in ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface,’ or in Bhabha’s words, the ‘irony of partial representation,’ points to the ‘menace,’ ‘strategic limitation or prohibition’ or ‘metonymy of presence’ (Bhabha, 1994:85-92). Aligning Seshadri-Crooks, Butler, Lorde and Bhabha with a focus on how the ‘not’ operates, amplifies the performative ‘repetition of partial presence’ that ‘rearticulates presence in terms of otherness,’ so that: ‘Mimicry *repeats* rather than *re-presents*...’ (Bhabha, 1994:88; emphasis in original). This results in

‘interdictory desire,’ ‘...the prodigious and strategic production of conflictual, fantastic, discriminatory “identity effects” in the play of a power...’ (Bhabha, 1994:90). Or, Seshadri-Crooks (2000a:21) would speak of the interdictory desire for whiteness as a translation of anxiety. Bhabha’s ‘...empty form of “the imitation...”’ (Bhabha, 1994:87; emphasis in original) resonates with Seshadri-Crooks use of Lacan’s ‘...discourse on the “emptiness” of rigid designators...’ (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000a:139) in her analysis of Morrison’s *Recitatif* (1983) and her deconstruction of the film, *Suture* (1993).

Throughout *Sister Outsider* Lorde examines the colonisation of the psychic space through the mechanism of mimicry. She incorporates aspects of Bhabha’s explanation that:

In mimicry, the representation of identity and meaning is rearticulated along the axis of metonymy. As Lacan reminds us, mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization or repression of difference, but a form of resemblance, that differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically. (Bhabha, 1994:90)

Lorde uses metonymy performatively to conjure in the reader’s imagination the ways that mimicry operates in the ‘psychic life of power.’ Lorde repeatedly cautions against masquerades of emancipatory transformation and the following passages provide examples of how she picks up this theme throughout *Sister Outsider*:

The old patterns, no matter how cleverly rearranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old

exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation, and suspicion. (Lorde, 1980a:123)

And when I speak of change, I do not mean a simple switch of positions... (Lorde, 1981:127).

My poetry, my life, my work, my energies for struggle were not acceptable unless I pretended to match somebody else's norm. I learned that not only couldn't I succeed at that game, but the energy needed for that masquerade would be lost to my work. (Lorde, 1982:137)

But if the quest to reclaim ourselves and each other remains there, then we risk another superficial measurement of self, one superimposed upon the old one and almost as damaging, since it pauses at the superficial. (Lorde, 1983a:174)

Evidently, mimicry operates not only to appropriate, but also to stall progress.

Drawing threads of the discussion together concerning configuration, disavowal, entrapments, implicit referents, location and regulation, I suggest that the metonym 'blackface' stands for an inextricable web of constructions that configure particular precarious relations of proximity. Relations between Black and white feminism are contingent upon '...injurious interpellations...' (Butler, 1997c:104) predicated on the regime of visibility. Post-colonial theory offers an analogous lens to scrutinise the mechanisms and manoeuvres of the 'psychic life of power' which are relevant to feminism.

Picking up references used earlier in this chapter in relation to how '...epistemology is flattened...' (Alarcón, 1990:361), the '...authorial subjects as

the implicit referent...’ (Mohanty, 1984:21) and Lorde’s (1979c:66-71) letter to Mary Daly, it is clear that the role of epistemology in feminism is not merely academic. Butler pulls together the relationship between the structure and constitution of address and interdependency of difference:

The structure of address is important for understanding how moral authority is introduced and sustained if we accept not just that we address others when we speak, but that in some way we come to exist, as it were, in the moment of being addressed, and something about our existence proves precarious when that address fails. (Butler, 2004:130)

Here, Butler explains the paradox of adopting a speaking position and being simultaneously undone by that position, and the same could be applied to all forms of representing and communicating epistemology. The tension is one of making a coherent, assertive and persuasive political address as evidence of existence, whilst knowing that the inevitable failure of the address reflects something of the precarity of existence. This situation is acutely amplified in relation to Black and white feminism because it provides questions about how they listen and address each other, and what is at stake.

Do the Manners of Black Feminists Need Reforming?

Staying with the tactic of mimicry, the parallels between the doctrine of Christianity and bureaucracy as imperial devices of regulatory colonial power with the regulatory aspects of the doctrine of feminism can be detected. Bhabha

(1994) details numerous examples of how bureaucracy in many different guises functions as an instrument of regulation: Bhabha states that Charles Grant's:

...dream of an evangelical system of mission education conducted uncompromisingly in the English language, was partly a belief in political reform along Christian lines and partly an awareness that the expansion of company rule in India required a system of subject formation - a reform of manners... (Bhabha, 1994:87)

Perhaps here, the question for the 'dream' of feminism concerns not only the language used, but what the deployment of that language functions to do. The following questions make this point in concrete terms: is the language used by feminism for the reform of manners, and if so, whose manners and what particular manners require reforming? If feminism is a movement for the emancipation of all women, then is there some notion that the manners of non-academic women need reforming into the ways of those women in academia? Do the manners of Black feminists need reforming? Bhabha refers to Sir Edward Cust's '...policy of a conferring on every colony of the British Empire a mimic representation of the British Constitution' (Cust, 1839, cited in Bhabha, 1994:85). Bhabha also refers to J. S. Mill's testimony to a Select Committee of the House of Lords in 1852 and quotes that:

"The whole government of India is carried out in writing,"...This appears to me a greater security for good government than exists in almost any other government in the world, because no other has a system of recordation so complete. (Mill, 1852, cited in Bhabha, 1994:93)

Perhaps in relation to the security of feminism, the issue could be articulated in terms of a critical analysis of the production and function of feminist archives and records. Furthermore, the issue is that of what is included and excluded in feminist records and who the stakeholders are. Referring to feminist scholarship, Mohanty cautions of ‘...a certain mode of appropriation and codification of scholarship...’ (Mohanty, 1984:17). Bhabha is clear that the examples he examines demonstrate an effort to ‘...construct a particularly appropriate form of colonial subjectivity’ (Bhabha, 1994:87). However, the result is only ‘...“partial reform”...’ (Bhabha, 1994:87). Spivak fittingly names the practice, ‘epistemic violence’ (Spivak, 1988: 280).

Spivak’s deconstruction of ideology as a tool of appropriation is clear in her seminal work, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’(1988). Here, Spivak challenges the intellectual equivalents of the British Constitution and Christian doctrine in her challenge of Foucault, Deleuze and Marx. Spivak considers:

...a text by two great practitioners of the critique: “Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze”...because it undoes the opposition between authoritative theoretical production and the unguarded practice of conversation, enabling one to glimpse the track of ideology. (Spivak, 1988: 272)

Spivak argues that the track of ideology demonstrates that ‘...Western intellectual production is, in many ways, complicit with Western international economic interests’ (Spivak, 1988: 271). In relation to ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface,’ the key point would be to consider the intellectual production of feminism within the context of prevailing socio-economic

conditions and interests. Making the parallel between imperial devices of regulation and intellectual production explicit, Spivak observes that:

Sometimes it seems as if the very brilliance of Foucault's analysis of the centuries of European imperialism produces a miniature version of that heterogeneous phenomenon: management of space-but by doctors; development of administrations-but in asylums; considerations of the periphery-but in terms of the insane, prisoners, and children. The clinic, the asylum, the prison, the university-all seem to be screen-allegories that foreclose a reading of the broader narratives of imperialism. (Spivak, 1988: 291)

The interdictory discourse embodied in 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' encapsulates the relationality of difference. The statement that 'Black feminism is not white feminism' is contingent upon an understanding that Black is not white. However, this representation of the understanding belies a set of complex relations that exceed and transgress any idea that the word 'Black' is bordered off from the word 'white.' Currie explains that:

This suggests that the meaning of words inheres in their relations with each other, that words have no foundations, and meanings are not self-contained. (Currie, 2004:2)

The Slippage of 'not'

The words 'Black' and 'white' are understood in relation to each other. In order to cope with this dialectic of interdependency and the ambivalence, the relation

‘...must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference’ (Bhabha, 1994:86) in order to maintain the construction of difference on axes of inequality. Put simply, the slippage is an inevitable result of maintaining the process of disavowal of the interdependency. In other words, the lack of stability and refusal of ‘Black’ and ‘white’ to be contained produces a slip. In the authority and directness of her rhetoric, Lorde does not appear to be slip-sliding and she shows no hint of uncertainty or of being undecided in her statement that ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface.’ However, a close re-reading of the statement reveals the quandary of giving voice to the specificity of particular entrapments, whilst also giving voice to the interdependency of difference. Probyn (1993:120) puts it neatly: ‘Without her I’m nothing...’ Butler explains how the process of becoming ‘nothing’ happens and she argues that the interdependency of difference is an ‘undoing’:

I tell a story about the relations I choose, only to expose, somewhere along the way, the way I am gripped and undone by these very relations...Let’s face it. We’re undone by each other. (Butler, 2004:23)

However, ‘...stricken by an indeterminacy...’ (Bhabha, 1994:86), or stricken ‘...with signs of its undoing’ (Butler, 2004:23), the ‘not’ in ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ is undone and fails. This failure is the slippage and excess referred to by Bhabha earlier, and this produces anxiety. It must be noted that, although Bhabha is referring to the situation of colonisation, and to the power relations between the coloniser and the colonised, application to the context of Black feminism and white feminism must include both Black and white feminisms as implicated. The idea of interdependency implies mutuality and Black and white feminisms/feminists are undone by each other.

‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ focuses the gaze on recognition and cautions against misrecognition. It appears that Lorde invites a scrutiny of the real ‘blackface.’ Lorde seems to be implying the existence, and therefore, the possibility of recognition, of the genuine from the imitation. This raises the problem of the construction, constitution and claim of authenticity. Spivak comments that:

...what I find useful is the sustained and developing work on the *mechanics* of the constitution of the Other; we can use it to much greater analytic and interventionist advantage than invocations of the *authenticity* of the Other. (Spivak, 1988: 294; emphasis in original).

Rather than debating whether or not Lorde is claiming a position of authenticity, Spivak directs the line of interrogation into the mechanics of the authentic. This would lead to questions about the production, function and contingencies of the construction of authenticity.

The anxious desire for recognition of that self-conscious difference, which is not an impersonation or parody of a stereotype, is an aspect of the ‘psychic life of power’ and an entrapment. Butler comments that:

...what is exteriorized or performed can only be understood by reference to what is barred from performance, what cannot or will not be performed. (Butler, 1997c:144)

Impersonations of ‘blackface’ function in relation to the ‘blackface’ that has been barred. Indeed, the situation of ‘barred’ implies that there is something to be barred. The word ‘barred’ is, therefore, inextricably bound to other contexts, meanings and words - some of which may be present and/or absent, available and/or unavailable, and close and/or distant. This complexity troubles the notion

of recognition because, having questioned the notion of a distinction between the real and false ‘blackface,’ the predicament is also one of recognition constituted on misrecognition, just as presence and absence are mutually constitutive. So, the dialectic of ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ is: who or what is constituting, and recognizing, who or what? Lorde comments that:

We have recognized and negotiated these differences, even when this recognition only continued the old dominant/subordinate mode of human relationship, where the oppressed must recognize the masters’ difference in order to survive. (Lorde, 1980a:122)

Perhaps engagement with, rather than disavowal of, the dialectics of recognition, would form a stronger basis for disrupting ‘the old dominant/subordinate’ positions.

Racist Social Structures Create Racist Psychic Structures

Butler’s question of, ‘What is the psychic form that power takes?’, (Butler, 1997c:2) is helpful in the project of understanding further the nuances and implications of ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface.’ Butler (1997c:3) explains that the ‘...project requires thinking the theory of power together with a theory of the psyche...’ because:

...power that at first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject’s self-identity. (Butler, 1997c:3)

Butler’s focus on the relationship between the psyche and power, and her focus on how subjectivity is constituted through the ‘psychic life of power,’ moves the enquiry beyond the regime of visibility. Moreover, Seshadri-Crooks’ analysis of

Recitatif (Morrison, 1983) and the film, *Suture* (1993), ‘...problematizes the referent, or the body as a site of knowledge...’ (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000a:148). Similarly and helpfully, Butler’s (1997c) *The Psychic Life of Power* enables a shift in gaze from black and white skin colour to a gaze on the mechanisms through which power interpellates the psyche. Thus, the question is not whether a psyche is, or becomes, black or white, but how the signifiers ‘black’ and ‘white’ are used by the ‘psychic life of power.’ Oliver calls for:

...a theory that operates between the psyche and the social, through which the very terms of psychoanalysis are transformed into social concepts.
(Oliver, 2004:xiv)

Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* is a detailed study of the colonisation of psychic space as an entrapment of the ‘psychic life of power.’ Fanon states in his introduction:

...I believe that only a psychoanalytical interpretation of the black problem can lay bare the anomalies of affect that are responsible for the structure of the complex. (Fanon, 2008:3)

Fanon and Lorde

I now move on in this chapter to juxtapose *Black Skin, White Masks*, ‘...a clinical study’ to analyse the ‘...psychoexistential complex’ (Fanon, 2008:5) with Lorde’s Black lesbian feminist, political essays in *Sister Outsider*. The aim of this juxtaposition is to explore the manoeuvres of the ‘psychic life of power’ and, specifically, to trace the particular entrapments used in the colonisation of psychic

space. This juxtaposition enables this line of inquiry to move from the regime of visibility, and the issue of recognition and misrecognition, to an analysis of how and why 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' because of what gets under, and goes on under, the skin. Butler (1997c:19) speaks about the '...process of incorporation...' to better understand and formulate questions about how power uses the psychic topography. Butler states that:

If forms of regulatory power are sustained in part through the formation of a subject, and if that formation takes place according to the requirements of power, specifically, as the incorporation of norms, then a theory of subject formation must give an account of this process of incorporation, and the notion of incorporation must be interrogated to ascertain the psychic topography it assumes. (Butler, 1997c:19)

Where Butler speaks of 'incorporation,' Fanon (2008:4) speaks of 'epidermalization' in relation to the specificity of racism. Fanon's concept of 'epidermalization' is particularly useful because it includes an equation of the regime of visibility, the psyche and the social. In this equation, the black epidermis cannot be mimicked because the process of incorporation that regulates the psychic topography forms particular subjectivities.

In *Black Skins, White Masks*, Fanon uses the term 'epidermalization' to describe the process whereby:

If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process: - primarily, economic; -subsequently, - the internalization - or, better, the epidermalization - of this inferiority. (Fanon, 2008:4)

More specifically, Fanon talks about ‘...a racial epidermal schema’ (Fanon, 2008:84). Oliver explains this as the process whereby, in racism:

...the body becomes nothing more than skin, abjected by dominant culture, alien to the one whose bodily integrity it paradoxically both protects and destroys. (Oliver, 2001:25)

Lorde invokes this racial bodily schema, recalling her own experience:

Did *bad* mean *Black*? The endless scrubbing with lemon juice in the cracks and crevices of my ripening, darkening, body. And oh, the sins of my dark elbows and knees, my gums and nipples, the folds of my neck and the cave of my armpits! (Lorde, 1983a:149, emphasis in original)

Deconstructing this quote, the black epidermis becomes the site where experience, affect, sexuality, the psychic relation to sin and the concept of bad are represented. Examining the syntax of Lorde’s description here and the relations between the words, it could be argued that the spaces in the ‘cracks,’ ‘crevices,’ ‘folds’ and ‘cave’ personify what Bhabha describes as:

...an interstitial space for the negotiation of meaning, value, judgement - how the “one” survives in/of the “other” as a kind of structure of doubling (not sublimation or sublation) - not pluralism, but excessive iteration... (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000c:376)

Lorde’s description summons identification, desire and the gap or slippage of the ‘not’ in ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface.’ Bhabha explains:

For the image - as point of identification - marks the site of an ambivalence. Its representation is always spatially split - it makes *present* something that is *absent* [...] The image is at once a metaphoric substitution, an illusion of presence and by that same token a metonym, a sign of its absence and loss. (Bhabha, 1986:xxx; emphasis in original)

The relevance of Fanon's work lies in his examination of the process of incorporation as an aspect of the psychic life of racism. Similar to Lorde, Fanon identifies and investigates how the 'entrapments used to neutralize' (Lorde, 1980a:118) Black people within racism are different than those for white people.

Neither Lorde nor Fanon are saying that racism only affects Black people; their emphasis is on how the entrapments or 'psychic life of power' operate differently depending on how skin color is positioned and represented. Both Lorde and Fanon analyse how '...racist social structures create racist psychic structures...' (Oliver, 2001:34). The key point is that the way in which '...racist social structures create racist psychic structures...' operates differently for Black and white people.

Furthermore, the intersection of the psychic and the social troubles the borders that are often created between the two; for example, as reflected in disciplinary borders that demarcate the social to sociology and the psyche to the psychological. Butler argues that the '...process of internalization *fabricates the distinction between interior and exterior life...*' (Butler, 1997c:19; emphasis in original). Butler elaborates her analysis to add further layers of complexity:

Where social categories guarantee a recognizable and enduring social existence, the embrace of such categories, even if they work in the service

of subjection, is often preferred to no social existence at all. How is it, then, that the longing for subjection, based on a longing for social existence, recalling and exploiting primary dependencies, emerges as an instrument and effect of the power of subjection? (Butler, 1997c:20)

A close re-reading of Lorde's and Fanon's experiences of racism provides a powerful response to Butler's difficult questions. Fanon explains that:

...I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonized native, robs me of all worth, all individuality, tells me that I am a parasite on the world, that I must bring myself as quickly as possible into step with the white world, "that I am a brute beast, that my people and I are like a walking dung-heap that disgustingly fertilizes sweet sugar cane and silky cotton, that I have no use in the world." Then I will quite simply try to make myself white: that is, I will compel the white man to acknowledge that I am human. (Fanon, 2008:73)

A re-reading of Fanon through a re-reading of Lorde opens up interesting dimensions of analysis in relation to Butler's comment that:

...the desire to survive, "to be," is a pervasively exploitable desire. The one who holds out the promise of continued existence plays to the desire to survive. (Butler, 1997c:7)

Drawing on her experience as a child, Lorde's description in the following passage brings together desire, epidermalization/racial bodily schema and dehumanisation:

...the stormy little Black girl who once longed to be white or anything other than who she was, since all she was ever allowed to be was the sum of the color of her skin and the textures of her hair, the shade of her knees and elbows, and those things were clearly not acceptable as human. (Lorde, 1983a:174)

Butler explains:

...if following Foucault, we understand power as *forming* the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence...the “we” who accept such terms are fundamentally dependent on those terms for “our” existence. (Butler, 1997c:2; emphasis in original)

Fanon (2008:73) is clear that the imposed terms of being ‘a parasite,’ of ‘no use,’ robbed of ‘all worth, all individuality,’ ‘a brute beast’ and ‘a walking dung-heap’ provide compelling motivation and rationale for coming into step with the very world that imposed the terms to ‘make myself white.’ The terms of what is ‘allowed’ and ‘acceptable’ (Lorde, 1983a:174) as products of racist ideology ‘...enter the colonized through the skin’ (Oliver, 2004:51). Both Fanon and Lorde establish the inextricable interdependency between ideology, embodiment and the ‘psychic life of power.’

Resisting the Terms of Oppression

If feminism is a political movement that questions and resists terms of oppression, and if these terms are different for Black and white women, it follows that Black feminism requires a questioning of, and resistance to, different terms than white feminism. A close re-reading of Lorde's 'not in blackface' is exactly this questioning and resistance to the terms invoked in the racist regimes of visibility and in the process of epidermalization, whereby 'stereotypes of inferiority are absorbed into the skin' (Oliver, 2001:24). Thus, Lorde uses the trope, but extends the analysis beyond mimicry to indicate a refusal to 'make myself white' (Fanon, 2008:73) in 'blackface.' Butler comments that:

If, as Norma Alarcón has insisted, women of color are "multiply interpellated," called by many names, constituted in and by that multiple calling, then this implies that the symbolic domain, the domain of socially instituted norms, is composed of *racializing norms*, and that they exist not merely alongside gender norms, but are articulated through one another. Hence it is no longer possible to make sexual difference prior to racial difference or, for that matter, to make them into fully separable axes of social regulation and power. (Butler, 1993b:279; emphasis in original)

'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' both acknowledges the psychic life of racism and resists its terms simultaneously.

Re-Reading of the Re-Reading: The Indeterminacy of Reiteration

This section of the chapter offers a personal, reflective re-reading of ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ where, in the spirit of re-reading Lorde, the analysis already articulated earlier in this chapter becomes a talking *with* Lorde rather than a talking *about* Lorde. Furthermore, the act of re-reading a re-reading, so to speak, offers an illustration of a key theme that runs throughout this thesis - namely, the inevitable space between all repetitions. Here, I am mindful of Spivak’s comment that:

The book is not repeatable in its “identify”: each reading of the book produces a simulacrum of an “original” that is itself the mark of the shifting and unstable subject... (Spivak, 1997:xii)

This thesis is particularly concerned to reveal the subversive potential for the activism of Black feminist theory within the inevitable fissures of every reiteration. This re-reading of the re-reading uses the indeterminacy of reiteration (including repetition of my own analysis already provided within this chapter) as a site for the application of ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface,’ with regards to feminist Black women-only services and spaces.

Drawing on a literary tradition of dialogue, conversation and interviews, as mirrored in Lorde’s work, this experimental pedagogical intervention constructs an imaginary conversation between activists and scholars across a temporal and spatial spectrum that juxtaposes a range of visions, standpoints and theoretical approaches. This imaginary conversation straddles the fictional and non-fictional in the sense that the actual words of the scholars cited are juxtaposed within a

fictional frame. This invented construction is a deliberate transgression of fixed, theoretical borders. This approach resists the:

...historical amnesia that keeps us working to invent the wheel every time we have to go to the store for bread. (Lorde, 1980a:117)

In grappling with a complex issue or concept, I often find myself constructing conversations with Lorde, who I have come to think of as a close friend and excellent company! In my teaching of critical analysis, I ask students to imagine they are hosting a dinner party, bringing different voices and perspectives to the table of their analysis in conversation with each other. The imaginary conversation that structures this plays with the concepts of the speech act and speaking position that are at the core of the subject under discussion.⁹ Furthermore, it represents a performance of intertextuality in action.

Black Women-Only Spaces and Services?

This conversation with Lorde grapples with a complexity of the activism of Black feminist theory that I continue to engage with - namely, the rationale and legitimacy of Black women-only reflective spaces, training, consciousness-raising and service provision. This 'breaking bread' (hooks and West, 1991) with

⁹ A version of this personal, reflective re-reading was delivered in February, 2012 for the Manchester Feminist Theory Network in a workshop on Audre Lorde, where the audience performed the conversation. Taking it in turns according to where they were seated, each person assumed the speaking position of the part that fell to them in their turn, with the exception that I maintained consistency of speaking my own words. This created an interesting situation of a white man speaking the words of a Black woman, and a white, middle-class woman speaking the words of a Black slave, Sojourner Truth, in 1851. It provoked discussion generally about the relation between the speech act and identity, and more specifically, picked up on important elements of the subject of the paper - namely, 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface.'

contemporary issues, theory and challenges is a method of demonstrating the relevance and translation of Lorde's work in a transatlantic, transnational context.

I want to show something of the universal reach of Lorde's attention to the specific, in response to reductionist binary divisions between the universal and the specific where the universal colonizes the specific and vice-versa. This conversation speaks with Lorde's statement that 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' to explore why there is a necessity for Black women-only provision. 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' captures the complexity of the relation, indicating that feminist approaches to the universal patriarchal subjugation of women must attend to the specificity of women's lived experience. Indeed, this very relation between the universal and the specific is at the heart of the activism of Black feminist theory.

The Conversation¹⁰

Suryia: Audre Lorde, you have been with me for the last 25 years as a feminist involved with the development of specific services for Black women survivors of sexual violence. Your work has helped me to develop Black women-only feminist training and Black women-only feminist consciousness-raising and reflective spaces. Within the struggle for, and occupancy of, these spaces, I am coming to understand something of being positioned as 'the sister outsider' (Byrd, 2009:5; Lorde, 1984).

¹⁰ I have taken the liberty of not using ellipses within the quotes used to construct this experimental, imaginary conversation so as not to interrupt the flow of the conversation.

Audre Lorde: ‘Ignoring the differences of race between women and the implications of those differences presents the most serious threat to the mobilization of women’s joint power. As white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and define *woman* in terms of their own experience alone, then women of Color become “other”, the outsider whose experience and tradition is too “alien” to comprehend’ (Lorde, 1980a:117; italics in original).

Suryia Nayak: Audre, even though you detailed the difficulty of this struggle, even though you sounded out the warnings and alerted me to the entrapments, I didn’t get it until I went through the doing of it. You forewarned the inquisition; you said there would be a questioning, where the questions asked of the activities of Black women are a questioning of our very being as women.

Audre Lorde: ‘I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. But this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live’ (Lorde, 1980a:117).

Suryia Nayak: The questions, sometimes asked directly, sometimes indirectly, sometimes not asked, but it is obvious the questions are being thought and the thoughts hang in the air, are: why do you need to have specific services for Black women? Why have separate Black women-only training, consciousness-raising and reflective spaces? What is so separate? What is so specific?

Well, Audre, I want to talk you about the answers to these questions, because the answers, and there are many answers, often fail to go to the heart of the issue and miss the point completely. The answers are difficult answers, not

because they are too complicated; the answers are difficult because they are difficult to hear; they are uncomfortable. The answers hurt.

Let us be clear about what is not the answer. The answer is not because of religion, culture, language, dress, geography, tradition or customs. Let us be clear: the subordination, regulation and control of women and girls through physical, sexual, mental and emotional abuse happens in every culture and uses the same mechanisms the world over. It would seem on the face of it that we have a contradiction; if the subordination and violation of women and girls uses the same tools of regulation, control and legitimization, then why have specific services for Black women? Why have Black women-only spaces? What is so different?

Before we discuss what the answer is, I want to say something more about what the answer is not. The wrong answers are particularly dangerous because they cover up and mask the real issues. The wrong answers function on camouflage and mimicry, so that when the real issues are voiced, when the real issues are made visible, they are not believed or recognised. What the answer is not is particularly dangerous because it silences women about the right answers. The result is that women are doubted and doubt themselves. Women are silenced and keep silent. Women know that the answers they are given are wrong. Women know from their lived experience what the answer is not, and in the face of no alternatives, they feel confused, isolated, mad and bad.

bell hooks: ‘Feminism has its party line and women who feel a need for a different strategy, a different foundation, often find themselves ostracized and silenced’ (hooks, 1984:9).

Audre Lorde: ‘There is a pretense to homogeneity of experience covered by the word *sisterhood* that does not in fact exist’ (Lorde, 1980a:116).

Chandra Talpade Mohanty: ‘I am trying to uncover how ethnocentric universalism is produced in certain analyses. As a matter of fact, my argument holds for any discourse that sets up its own authorial subjects as the implicit referent, that is, the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural others. It is in this move that power is exercised in discourse’ (Mohanty, 1984:21).

Elizabeth Spelman: ‘[P]ositing an essential “womanness” has the effect of making women inessential in a variety of ways. First of all, if there is an essential womanness that all women have and have always had, then we needn’t know anything about any woman in particular. For the details of her situation and her experience are irrelevant to her being a woman. Thus if we want to understand what “being a woman” means, we needn’t investigate her individual life or any other woman’s individual life. All those particulars become inessential to her being and our understanding of her being a woman. And so she also becomes inessential in the sense that she is not needed in order to produce the “story of woman”. If all women have the same story “as women”, we don’t need a chorus of voices to tell the story (Spelman, 1988a:236).

bell hooks: ‘Defined in this way, it is unlikely that women would join feminist movement simply because we are biologically the same’(hooks, 1984:24).

Simone de Beauvoir: ‘Certainly woman like man is a human being; but such an assertion is abstract; the fact is that every concrete human being is always uniquely situated. Rejecting the notions of the eternal feminine, the black soul or the Jewish character is not to deny that there are today Jews, blacks or women:

this denial is not a liberation for those concerned, but an inauthentic flight. Clearly, no woman can claim without bad faith to be situated beyond her sex' (de Beauvoir, 2010:4).

bell hooks: 'As a black woman interested in feminist movement, I am often asked whether being black is more important than being a woman; whether feminist struggle to end sexist oppression is more important than the struggle to end racism and vice-versa' (hooks, 1984:29).

Kadiatu Kanneh: 'The idea that women should ignore the divisions between themselves and sweep together across class, race and national boundaries to create a post-historical Utopian home, bypasses the knowledge that racial oppression has always created the body from obsessive fantasies of biology and environment' (Kanneh, 1992:296).

Suryia Nayak: The tension is that the very problem that gives rise for the need for Black women-only provision could easily become the problem that Black women-only spaces reproduce. Here, I am imagining a Black women-only, 'Native Informant' (Spivak, 1986:66) 'party line' (hooks, 1984:9) that inverts the 'inauthentic flight' (de Beauvoir, 2010:4) based on an assumed authenticity that would only reproduce essentialism.

Sara Suleri: 'The claim to authenticity - only a black can speak for a black; only a postcolonial subcontinental feminist can adequately represent the lived experience of that culture - points to the great difficulty posited by the "authenticity" of female racial voices in the great game that claims to be the first narrative of what the ethnically constructed woman is deemed to want. This desire all too often takes its theoretical form in a will to subjectivity that claims a

theoretical basis most clearly contravened by the process of its analysis' (Suleri, 1992:251).

Kelly Oliver: The crux of the matter is that 'Fanon insists that racist social structures create racist psychic structures' (Oliver, 2001:34).

Suryia Nayak: A certain logic flows from this; we all live in a racist society, and racism shapes who we are and makes us all racist subjects, regardless of whether we are black or white. And here is the clever bit; actually, it has nothing and everything to do with the colour of skin.

Unfortunately, this logic becomes the basis for the following argument; because we are all constituted by racism, the specificity of being black or white is redundant, or to highlight colour is to replicate racist structures, practices and thinking. It is a logic used to question the legitimacy of Black women-only spaces.

Audre Lorde: 'I can't tell you how many good white psychwomen have said to me, "Why should it matter if I am Black or white?" who would never think of saying, "Why does it matter if I am female or male?"' (Lorde, 1983a:161-162).

Suryia Nayak: The question is that if 'racist social structures create racist psychic structures,' does this operate differently for Black and white people, and if so, how and why?

Audre Lorde: I am reminded of the opening sentence to my essay, 'Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface' found in *Sister Outsider*: 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' (Lorde, 1979a:60).

Suryia Nayak: It seems to me that ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface,’ and could never be, precisely because ‘racist social structures create racist psychic structures’ Audre, I want to stay with your provocative sentence, ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ as an anchor for our conversation today. Four words from this sentence could act as theoretical lenses to look at how and why ‘racist social structures create racist psychic structures’ Let me outline this:

- The word ‘feminism’ as a lens; here, I am concerned with ideology as a mechanism to convert the social into the psychic;
- The word ‘not’ as a lens; here, I am particularly fascinated with the difficult dependency each of us has on the ‘not’ and the relationality of the ‘not’;
- The word ‘in’ as a lens; here, I want to explore how ideology is ‘in’ skin;
- The word ‘blackface’ as a lens; all I want to say at this point is: beware of mimicry.

In the context of this conversation, ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ could be restated as: ‘Black liberation theories are not white liberation theories in blackface.’ In other words, liberation ideological approaches, in order to be liberating at all, must take into consideration the fact that particular social structures create particular psychic structures.

Judith Butler: ‘Such a project requires thinking the theory of power together with a theory of the psyche...power that at first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject’s self-identity’ (Butler, 1997c:3).

Suryia Nayak: Women only spaces and services must attend to the specificity of the ‘pressing’, because if this assumes a different psychic form in the constitution of Black and white women then the implications are far reaching.

Audre Lorde: ‘Thus, in a patriarchal power system where whiteness privilege is a major prop, the entrapments used to neutralize Black women and white women are not the same’ (Lorde, 1980a:118).

Suryia Nayak: The imperative is to attend to the specificity of the ‘entrapments’ and, when this specificity is applied to the sentence, ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface,’ it opens up a whole range of implications. Audre, you imply much more than a reductionist black and white binary division translated into separatist Black and white women only spaces and services. ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ invokes the interdependency of difference with the inherent political and epistemological problems, paradoxes and ambivalence of dependency and reliance on the ‘Other’.

Audre Lorde: In ‘An Open Letter to Mary Daly’ (Lorde, 1979c), I speak directly that: ‘To imply, however, that all women suffer the same oppression simply because we are women is to lose sight of the many varied tools of patriarchy. It is to ignore how those tools are used by women without awareness against each other.’ (Lorde, 1979c:67) ‘For then beyond sisterhood is still racism’ (Lorde, 1979c:70).

Suryia Nayak: Audre, you establish as political the very terms through which Black feminism is articulated and identified. Audre, I like your use of the word ‘tools’ and your caution that if we do not get to grips with the ‘many varied tools’ of a racist, homophobic patriarchy, how on earth would we be aware of using

them against each other as Black and white feminists? I propose a feminist mechanics of theory to encourage a labouring on the engineering of theory. I contend that the tools we use need to be sharp, precise and fit for the job.

Furthermore, the subject under analysis, for example the concepts, issues and tensions that require engineering, constitute the tools required for the job. In other words, 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' is at once the subject under analysis and constitutes the tools for analysis. 'Beyond sisterhood,' indeed beyond separate spaces, there is still racism and this applies whether we self-define as a Black or white feminist. 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' goes to the heart of fundamental questions concerning the basis, membership, definition and aim of feminism. The statement provokes questions as to who and what is foreclosed, and how, and who is constituted, in what ways and why?

Let's play with your quote, Audre, to get a feel of the possible implications. 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface' provokes questions such as: would there be Black feminism without white feminism? Would there be white feminism without Black feminism? In the context of racist assumed white supremacy, can there be feminism without the prefixes of 'black' and 'white'? How do the signifiers 'black' and 'white' function?

An ideology, space or service does not become a Black ideology, space or service by painting a black face on it. A white, Eurocentric ideology does not convert to a black version by having black faces in the literature, research, conferences or institutions. Any ideology, movement and force for change do not

become black by increasing the representation of a particular pigmentation. So, it has nothing and everything to do with the colour of skin.

Kalpna Seshadri-Crooks: ‘Racial identity, too, I would like to suggest - i.e., words like black and white, when used as nouns - works like names. That is, they are rigid designators - they are signifiers that have no signified. [...] it may be more productive to view racial color designators as operating not unlike proper names. The proper name is neither wholly one’s own (i.e., we are all named by others) nor is it meaningful. [...] No set of qualitative descriptions can establish black or white identity across all possible worlds, but we cannot therefore say that black and white do not exist’ (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000a:141; parentheses in original)

Toni Morrison: In my short story, *Recitatif* (Morrison, 1983), I experimented with ‘the removal of all racial codes from a narrative about two characters of different races for whom racial identity is crucial’ (Morrison, 1992:xi).

Kalpna Seshadri-Crooks: My reading of *Recitatif* enabled me to understand the questions: ‘When the signifier “black” or “white” points to a specific body, what have we discovered about it? Is there some knowledge, something that we know, due to the function of the signifier?’ (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000a:148).

Suryia Nayak: The key is not in the noun(s), but how the nouns act as envelopes or containers that transport and transform racist social structures into racist psychic structures.

Louis Althusser: The way I understand the relationship between social structures and psychic structures is that ‘ideology “acts” or “functions” in such a way that it

“recruits” subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or “transforms” the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: “Hey, you there!”” (Althusser, 1971:33; parentheses and emphasis in original).

Suryia Nayak: So, it could be argued that the recruitment is different for different individuals and the transforming is different for different individuals.

Elsbeth Probyn: Black ideology is not white ideology in blackface because ‘we are interpellated differently...we are hailed by different ideologies in different ways’ (Probyn, 2003:298).

Suryia Nayak: Having established some basic principles and a general context, let us look at the four lenses outlined at the beginning of our conversation:

The First Lens: The Word ‘feminism’

Feminism – could be described as an ideology to counter and expose oppressive patriarchal social productions of women. Even if one were to argue that the oppressive effects of patriarchy are universal, feminist ideologies cannot be not universally applied because we are hailed and constituted as subjects differently. Judith, in *The Psychic Life of Power* you speak of a ‘passionate attachment’ to ‘injurious interpellations’ (Butler, 1997c:7 and 104, respectively). So, there is the hailing and there is our ‘passionate attachment’ to the hailing, even when the hailing oppresses us.

Because Black people are recruited, transformed and attached differently than white people, and white people are recruited, transformed and attached differently to Black people, the ideology required to look at the specificity of the recruitment, the specificity of the transformation and the specificity of the attachment cannot be the same for Black and white people. Let us shift the focus from ideology to space, remaining with mechanisms of production and constitution.

Elsbeth Probyn: ‘the space and place we inhabit produce us’ (Probyn, 2003: 294).

Suryia Nayak: Thus, subjectivity is constituted by space and place. If we accept that Black and white people inhabit different spaces, it follows that the space and place that produces Black subjectivity is not the space and place that produces white subjectivity.

So we have a situation where the Black and white psyche are constituted and regulated differently because they occupy different spaces, and are recruited, transformed and passionately attached differently. Black women only reflective, consciousness raising and service provision spaces acknowledge these differences for Black and white women. In all of the Black women-only spaces and services we have created, Black women report that it is either or both the first and only space available in their lives to share and bear witness to their lived experience of the ways that racism, sexism and other forms of oppression intersect.

The Combahee River Collective: ‘The overwhelming feeling that we had is that after years and years we has finally found each other’ (The Combahee River Collective, 1977:268).

Audre Lorde: ‘Black women and our children know the fabric of our lives is stitched with violence and with hatred, that there is no rest...For us, increasingly, violence weaves through the daily tissues of our living - in the supermarket, in the classroom, in the elevator, in the clinic and the schoolyard, from the plumber, the baker, the saleswoman, the bus driver, the bank teller, the waitress who does not serve us. Some problems we share as women, some we do not’ (Lorde, 1980a:119).

The Second Lens: The Word ‘not’

‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ is not simply referring to sameness and difference. Audre, you trouble the notion of a shared feminism through the word ‘not.’ The distinction between Black feminism and white feminism is made available by the ‘not.’ This should not be confused with fixed, oppositional, essentialist categories of black and white. The ‘not’ functions to embody a difficult interdependency of difference on the ‘Other,’ especially where there is a power differential.

If the basis for identification and recognition is in relation to the Other, and if for Black feminisms the ‘Other’ is white feminisms, and vice-versa, the relationality is paradoxical on a cognitive level and intensely uncomfortable on an emotional level. This is why the answer to the question of why do we need to have Black women only spaces and services is so difficult to hear.

In other words, the constitution of Black feminism is contingent upon an interdependency with white feminism predicated on the ‘not.’ It is Black

feminism because it is not white feminism. This dynamic is embodied and performed in the linguistic structure of the statement.

Julia Kristeva: ‘The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*’ (Kristeva, 1969:37; emphasis in original).

Suryia Nayak: So, it could go something like: intertextuality as intersubjectivity, where the sum of the parts is greater than the individual elements, as in intersectionality.

Julia Kristeva: ‘each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read...any text is the absorption and transformation of another...The word as minimal textual unit thus turns out to occupy the status of mediator, linking structural models to cultural (historical) environment, as well as that of *regulator*’ (Kristeva, 1969:37; parentheses and emphasis in original).

Suryia Nayak: Examination of the function, position, significance, constitution and configuration of the gap(s) between the words in ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ is a method to deconstruct the intersubjective interdependence of the words. To be more specific, the space and place between the words in ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ function as the space and place between Black and white feminisms.

Julia Kristeva: ‘The word is spatialized’ (Kristeva, 1969:37).

Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan: ‘The politics of location is productive...because it makes one location vulnerable to the claims of another and enables multiple contested readings of the one reality from a variety of locations and

positions...unless the many mediations that interpellate location are studied in all their interconnectedness, locational analyses will be no more than exercises in defensive self-absorption' (Radhakrishnan, 2000:56-57).

Suryia Nayak: Can I just add in here the issue of recognition and misrecognition as fundamental to 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface.' What we recognise or do not recognise determines whether or not 'we lose sight of the complex and multiple ways' (Alarcón, 1990:361) in which different women are hailed and constituted. Feminist epistemology, inquiry and activism must examine the detail of the one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion as an act of recognised hailing.

Sojourner Truth's experience is a classic example of misrecognition. In 1851 at the Women's Convention in Ohio, even amongst other women, she had to ask over and over again, because it wasn't obvious, despite the fact that she was baring her breasts, 'Ain't I A Woman?' As a Black slave, Sojourner was not recognised as a woman. The acts of recognition and misrecognition are mutually contingent and constitutive.

Stuart Hall: 'identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the "positive" meaning of any term - and thus its "identity" - can be constructed...identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render "outside", abjected. Every identity has at its "margin", an excess, something more. The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as

foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure' (Hall, 1996:17-18; emphasis in original).

Suryia Nayak: Sojourner Truth personified the 'constitutive outside.' Identification and attachment amongst the men and women at the convention was based on shared commonalities between them. They did not recognise that their identification was based on what is different and, thus, excluded and left out. Their shared identification and identity as women at the convention was contingent upon misrecognition of the 'Other.' Sojourner Truth was the 'Other' and found herself repeating the question, 'Ain't I A Woman?' The point is that the 'constitutive outside' contingent upon misrecognition creates its own separate spaces. The Women's Convention in Ohio in 1851 effectively became a separate space that Sojourner Truth was excluded from.

Returning to the concern about answers that I opened this conversation with, it would appear that the wrong answer, or what the answer is *not*, is constituted by what it excludes and leaves outside - namely, what the answer *is*.

There are several intersecting tensions here: the 'not' is only the 'not' in relation to what it actually is, or is not, and this is highly problematic because it edges far too close to the dangerous claim of an authentic subject. Black can only be black because it is not white, and white is white because it is not black; thus, black and white are mutually constitutive. The border between black and white produces a false binary.

The predicament is that the 'not' demarcates the border of specificity that enables us to distinguish Black feminism from white feminism – how else could

we spot the masquerade of white feminism in ‘blackface’? However, borders are indeterminate; borders are mutually constitutive; the tension is that borders are not real, they are constructions that cease to exist under deconstruction (Thiongo, 1996:120).

To summarise, ‘racist social structures create racist psychic structures’ even though the recruitment, transformation and ‘passionate attachment’ are different, the ‘not’ reminds us that the difference is in relation to, interdependent of, and contingent upon, the ‘not.’ The quandary is how to create black women only spaces and services that give voice to the specificity of particular entrapments whilst also giving voice to the interdependency of difference, without falling foul of authenticity and borders.

The Third Lens: The Word ‘in’

How does the social get into the psyche in order to create and transform? We have established that recruitment and ‘passionate attachment’ mean that the getting ‘in’ is different for Black and white people with different effects, even though they are constituted by, and through, each other.

Judith Butler: ‘a theory of subject formation must give an account of this process of incorporation, and the notion of incorporation must be interrogated to ascertain the psychic topography it assumes’ (Butler, 1997c:19).

Suryia Nayak: Judith, where you speak of ‘incorporation,’ Frantz Fanon speaks of ‘epidermalization’ in relation to the specificity of racism. Here is where the epidermis, or the black skin, comes in very specifically and directly.

Frantz Fanon: In *Black Skins, White Masks*, I use the term ‘epidermalization’ to describe the process whereby: ‘If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process: - primarily, economic; - subsequently, the internalization – or, better, the epidermalization - of this inferiority’ (Fanon, 2008:4). More specifically I talk about ‘a racial epidermal schema’ (Fanon, 2008:84).

Audre Lorde: ‘Did *bad* mean *Black*? The endless scrubbing with lemon juice in the cracks and crevices of my ripening, darkening, body. And oh, the sins of my dark elbows and knees, my gums and nipples, the folds of my neck and the cave of my armpits!’ (Lorde, 1983a:149).

Suryia Nayak: In my close re-reading of your words, Audre, the space and place of the ‘cracks,’ ‘crevices,’ ‘folds’ and ‘cave’ function in the ‘racial epidermal schema’ (Fanon, 2008:84) performatively (invoking the endless repetition) to embody the anxiety and ambivalence in the gap of the ‘not’ white, which needs to be reformed into a ‘not’ Black.

We could say that the skin functions as a surface for the incorporation or ‘epidermalization’ of the ‘psychic life of power.’ The black epidermis or ‘blackface’ is at once both an empty signifier and a bodily envelope/skin for incorporation of ideology. Thus, the skin functions as a symbolic site of interpellation. This is why it has nothing and everything to do with the colour of skin. Furthermore, it is another aspect of how social structures constitute, interpellate and injure Black and white people differently.

Judith Butler: ‘I argue that this process of internalization *fabricates the distinction between interior and exterior life*...Where social categories guarantee a recognizable and enduring social existence, the embrace of such categories,

even as they work in the service of subjection, is often preferred to no social existence at all' (Butler, 1997c:19-20; emphasis in original).

Suryia Nayak: Hence, the excruciating 'passionate attachment' to that which oppresses us is one of 'the many varied tools of patriarchy (Lorde, 1979c:67) that Audre referred to earlier on.

Kelly Oliver: 'the colonized do not internalize but rather epidermalize racist ideology. The values of racist imperialism enter the colonized through the skin.' (Oliver, 2004: 51).

Frantz Fanon: 'I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonized native, robs me of all worth, all individuality, tells me that I am a parasite on the world, that I must bring myself as quickly as possible into step with the white world, "that I am a brute beast, that my people and I are like a walking dung-heap that disgustingly fertilizes sweet sugar cane and silky cotton, that I have no use in the world." Then I will quite simply try to make myself white: that is, I will compel the white man to acknowledge that I am human' (Fanon, 2008:73).

Audre Lorde: Let me describe to you 'the stormy little Black girl who once longed to be white or anything other than who she was, since all she was ever allowed to be was the sum of the color of her skin and the textures of her hair, the shade of her knees and elbows, and those things were clearly not acceptable as human. (Lorde, 1983a:174).

Suryia Nayak: Frantz and Audre, you establish the inextricable interdependency between ideology, embodiment and the 'psychic life of power.' If feminism is a

political movement that questions and resists the terms ‘allowed’ and ‘acceptable’ (Lorde, 1983a:174) of oppression, and if these terms are different for Black people, it follows that Black feminism perhaps requires a questioning of, and resistance to, different terms than white feminism. In turn, perhaps this questioning and resistance require Black women-only spaces.

The Fourth Lens: The Word ‘blackface’

Suryia Nayak: In using the word ‘blackface,’ Audre, you provoke associations of the Black and white minstrels.

Homi Bhabha: ‘blackface’ conjures up the mimicry of ‘the “not quite/not white”’ (Bhabha, 1994:92). Mimicry is ‘the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*’ (Bhabha, 1994:86; emphasis in original).

Suryia Nayak: In other words, in the context of colonisation, any form white feminism in ‘blackface’ would be an example of colonisation. The coloniser constructs the colonised as ‘*almost the same, but not quite*’ because the success of the takeover rests on maintaining the difference between the colonised and the coloniser; the coloniser cannot afford the colonised to make the mistake of thinking that they are equal. Well, this is a stressful situation.

Homi Bhabha: It is in the gap of the ‘almost’ that ambivalence exists; ‘mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference’ (Bhabha, 1994:86; emphasis in original).

Suryia Nayak: In using the term ‘blackface,’ I hear Audre saying: beware of mimicry, beware of masquerades and of how the ‘almost’ has to ‘continually produce its slippage.’ I am beginning to understand, Audre, why you warn us that ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface.’ I understand the reasons why you are so suspicious of such mimicry, because:

- Mimicry is one of the entrapments used to neutralise black and white women. Audre, I am reminded of your words, ‘*the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house*’ (Lorde, 1979b:112; emphasis in original);
- Mimicry defends against the painful wrench of undoing the recruitment and ‘passionate attachment.’ Mimicry allows the masquerade of an unaltered altered position;
- Mimicry makes collusion with oppression more palatable;
- The ‘almost the same’ both establishes and shrinks the gap between different subjects making unbearable relationality more bearable. Well, the ‘almost the same’ means that there is less need to interrogate the construction of difference.

Very dangerous territory, indeed!

Conclusion

Suryia Nayak: ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ could translate to say ‘Black women-only feminist spaces and services are not white women feminist spaces and services in blackface.’ Changing the face does not

fundamentally change the object beneath. It does not alter the hailing and does nothing to alter the unequal power differentials that racism requires. It is like ‘the phantom of the opera’ - still ugly beneath the mask. This is why ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ has nothing and everything to do with the colour of skin. Thus, this is why Black women-only spaces and services have nothing and everything to do with the colour of skin.

Audre Lorde: ‘The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference... The old patterns, no matter how cleverly rearranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation and suspicion’ (Lorde, 1980a:123).

‘I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices’ (Lorde, 1979b:113; emphasis in original).

Chapter 3

An Analysis and Application of

‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power’

Introduction

...it is necessary to rethink the relation between knowledge and emotion and construct conceptual models that demonstrate the mutually constitutive rather than oppositional relation between reason and emotion. (Jaggar, 1989:190)

...a return to an interest in affect as that which gives rise to subjectivity, rather than following on from it. (Frosh and Baraitser, 2009:159)

Between these two quotes there are two sets of relationships: knowledge and emotion, and subjectivity and emotion. This chapter provides a possible re-reading of Lorde’s (1978a) paper, ‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power.’

This chapter explores the ways in which Lorde demonstrates the inextricable link between the two sets of relationships outlined above; that of affect and epistemology, and that of affect and subjectivity. For Lorde, epistemology constructs and constitutes affect, affect constructs and constitutes epistemology, affectual epistemology and epistemology of affect constructs and constitutes subjectivity.

The 'Always Already'

Although Lorde does not explicitly propose these mutually constitutive relations in any linear sequence, her line of enquiry pushes at the temporal and spatial implications of the concept of the 'always already.' Chapter 4 of this thesis provides an exploration of the ways in which the 'always already' is taken up by a range of Black feminist thinkers in relation to subject constitution and representation. However, with specific reference to Black women and the 'always already' of the erotic, the work of Kaplan (1996) interrogates a range of Black women's writing through the lens of *The Erotics of Talk...*

Actually, Lorde does not use the aphorism, 'always already.' In fact, in the text of 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,' Lorde does not use the word 'already' and only uses the word 'always' once, prefixed with the qualification, 'almost always' (Lorde, 1978a:59). However, as will become evident in this analysis, Lorde's contestation of given constructions of the erotic and her analysis of the function of '...certain proscribed erotic comings-together' (invoking 'prescribed' and the forbidden/prohibited of 'proscribed') enable her to make the claim of an alternative woman-centred erotic (Lorde, 1978a:59). The problem here is that, whether the construction of the erotic is an appropriated patriarchal construction or an alternative construction proposed by Lorde, the fact of a construction of the erotic is being proposed and exists. In other words, there is no escape from the situation of a construction.

All constructions are implicated¹¹ and, as such, the following questions are relevant to this critical inquiry: what does the construction function to do? What

¹¹ See the 'Introduction' to this thesis for a fuller exploration of 'implicated.'

does the construction open up and foreclose? What is the construction a product of, and what does it go on to produce? In regards to the ‘always already,’ these questions imply that constructions are always and already part of an infinite web of *différance* (Derrida, 1972b). In other words, constructions are in a never-ending dynamic of referral and deferral to all other constructions without beginning or end. This point troubles the notions of appropriation and reclamation - two notions that are core to Lorde’s thesis concerning ‘Uses of the Erotic,’ and as Derrida claims, ‘I do not believe appropriation to be possible in general’ (Derrida, 1988:141).

Although I am proposing that these issues are pertinent to a re-reading of ‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,’ their relevance is much broader. Application to the political imperatives of feminist politics means that in stating alternative positions to those that are produced within a racist, homophobic patriarchy, feminist discourse and practices need to be vigilant not to fall into the trap of producing fundamentalist construction of that which is apparently appropriated, distorted and ‘Beyond the superficial...’ (Lorde, 1978a:56). I use the word ‘vigilant’ because focussing on whether something has been distorted or not, or appropriated or not, is a distraction from the function of the distortion and the function of the appropriation.

The crux of the matter lies in the issue of production. In other words, in the context of an examination of the ‘uses of the erotic,’ the crux of the matter is: what are the ‘uses of the erotic’ a production of and what do the ‘uses of the erotic’ produce?

The importance of the temporal and spatial relation between the notions of a before and an after in regards to knowledge and formation of subjectivity is fundamental to philosophical, political and literary thinking. Heidegger's (1962) explication of 'da-sein,' which literally means that being-there/there-being is bound up with the 'always already' (*immer schon* in German) in that 'da-sein' anticipates, or is ahead of, itself. The adverb 'always already' disrupts the idea of temporal and/or spatial dimensions so that inhabiting, experiencing and knowing in any particular time and space have always passed (are in the past), and therefore, have already been. Althusser uses the adverb 'always already' (*toujours-déjà-donné* in French) to disrupt the idea that there is a subject who, through time and space, is influenced by ideology. Althusser uses the 'always already' to convey that subjects exist only in, and by virtue of, ideology.

Perhaps Althusser would ask Lorde the following questions: if we are 'always-already interpellated,' where did the '...resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane...' (Lorde, 1978a:53) originate? How did '...that part of us which is chaotic, messy, deep, dark, ancient, old, and freeing' (Kraft, 1986:147) escape the 'always already'? Is there not an inherent contradiction in the statement, 'If we are to create a new order, we must go back, back, back to what is primary...' (Kraft, 1986:146)? Are you saying that there is a 'primary' body of knowledge or feeling that pre-exists or was/is allowed to survive in the site of, or that it exists in spite of, the apparatus of racist, homophobic patriarchy? This imaginary encounter between Lorde and Althusser provokes the following questions: does Lorde presuppose the subject prior to ideology? Does Lorde presuppose the agency of the subject? These questions go

to the heart of debates about essentialism, authenticity and the issues inherent in claims of reclamation.

Rather than resorting to a reductionist interpretation of Lorde's claims as positivist, or rather than resorting to an analysis that replicates the binary of essentialist/non-essentialist, this chapter explores how Lorde grapples with these tensions to open up spaces for feminist emancipation within the apparent, fixed boundary of racist, homophobic patriarchal interpellations. In other words, how does Lorde's reclamation of the 'uses of the erotic' fit with Althusser's influential claim that:

As ideology is eternal, I must now suppress the temporal form in which I have presented the functioning of ideology, and say: ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: *individuals are always-already subjects*. (Althusser, 1971:34; emphasis in original)

Indeed, to complicate matters further, Lorde is in agreement that ideology constructs the subject. Lorde uses this to develop an argument that an alternate ideology will construct alternate subject formations and encounters. Turning to an interview that Lorde did with Adrienne Rich in 1979, Lorde explains:

AL: After I published "Uses of the Erotic," a number of women who read it said that this is antifeminist, that the use of the erotic as a guide is-

AR: Antifeminist?

AL: Is reducing us once again to the unseen, the unstable. That in writing it I am returning us to a place of total intuition without insight.

AR: And yet, in that essay you're talking about work and power - about two of the most political things that exist.

AL: Yes, but what they see is - and I address this at the very beginning: I try to say that the erotic has been used against us, even the word itself, so often, that we have been taught to suspect what is deepest in ourselves, and that is the way we learn to testify against ourselves, against our feelings (Rich, 1979:64).

Tensions of the 'Beyond'

Lorde's complex treatise on the 'uses of the erotic' provokes debate about the relationship between affective states, the production of knowledge and the constitution of female subjectivity. Lorde proposes a basis for political efficacy founded on 'a place of total intuition' (Rich, 1979:64). A close re-reading of the text implies that the function and place of 'total intuition' is located in the 'beyond' illustrated in the following excerpts:

It is never easy to demand the most from ourselves, from our lives, from our work. To encourage excellence is to go *beyond* the encouraged mediocrity of our society... (Lorde, 1978a:54; emphasis mine)

Beyond the superficial, the considered phrase, "It feels right to me," acknowledges the strength of the erotic into a true knowledge... (Lorde, 1978a:56; emphasis mine)

The fear of our desires keeps them suspect and indiscriminately powerful, for to suppress any truth is to give it strength *beyond* endurance. The fear that we cannot grow *beyond* whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression as women. (Lorde, 1978a:57-58; emphasis mine)

I am concerned to explore the tensions of ‘beyond’ because these tensions are bound up with the complexity of the ‘always already.’

My contention is that locating ‘a place of total intuition,’ the space of ‘It feels right to me’ and place of ‘our desires’ in the ‘beyond’ may prod at, but cannot provide escape from, the implicated ‘always already.’ The claim that ‘The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find...’ implies, firstly, the existence of, and distinction between, distortion/distorted and a phenomenon that is not distortion/distorted. Secondly, the claim implies a spatial and temporal relation between that which is distorted and that which is not distorted. I agree with Bhabha that:

The “beyond” is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past...For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the “beyond”: an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà* - here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither, back and forth. (Bhabha, 1994:1; italics in original)

I argue that Lorde’s examination of the construction of the erotic and the emotional impact of the erotic destabilises:

...the boundary confusions built into the structure of these feelings, whether in the form of inside/outside, self/world, or psyche/body, reappear in the aesthetic forms and genres they determine. (Ngai, 2005:22)

This particular close re-reading of 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power' examines the rhetorical strategies used by Lorde to produce 'a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the "beyond"' (Bhabha, 1994:1) as a basis for feminist political efficacy. The establishment of a 'beyond' is impossible, but, perhaps, it is within the conditions of this impossibility that the conditions of the possibility of transformation can be contemplated. The essence of this situation is explained by Bhabha in the following way:

"Beyond" signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future; but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary - the very act of going *beyond* - are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the "present" which, in the process of repetition, becomes disjunct and displaced. (Bhabha, 1994:4; emphasis in original)

Constitutive 'Uses of the Erotic'

In this chapter I investigate the Constitutive 'Uses of the Erotic' with specific reference to:

- The inherent tension of positionality of the message and the messenger in terms of Lorde's position as writer, and the content of her argument;
- How Lorde marshals the problematic of binary positions such as public/private and rational/non-rational to transgress borders;

- Lorde's exploration of the relationship between affect in the form of the erotic and interpellation;
- The problematic of the guises and function of 'distortion';
- The mutually contingent, constitutive relationships between fear and proximity, and disconnection and connection;
- How Lorde identifies and proposes an alternative radical re-working of the erotic as the basis for harnessing the power for transformation;
- 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power' as a tool for intervention and thinking in relation to violence against women.

I will show that the strategies of a close re-reading of the construction of Lorde's text, tracing the lines of her enquiry, exploration of her claims, and textual analysis of her literary techniques and rhetorical devices, demonstrate how she builds a theory of reclamation as a mode of political resistance. For example, her title, 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power' refuses any fixed, decided position of possession, or right or wrong. The title itself is an indeterminate space without protagonist, without moral judgement and without a decided 'uses of.' Left open, the unknown, unspecified demarcations of 'uses of' leaves space for the signification of the erotic to be altered. The uncertainty invoked in the title stands in defiance of the fixed positions of the male-fashioned erotic that she is contesting. However, the audience is left in no doubt that there is an inextricable relationship between the erotic and power.

Taking up Lorde's focus on fear, proximity, anticipation, mobility, vision and knowledge, I examine how the sum of these is greater than the individual parts to form an effective strategy of female subjugation.

Placing Lorde alongside Foucault, it could be argued that the construction of the erotic is an example of:

...one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. (Foucault, 1980:98)

In 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power' Lorde examines the how the erotic functions as an instrument of power to constitute the female subject, so that the female is identified as, and is synonymous with, a racist, homophobic, patriarchal erotic. Furthermore, this analysis shows that different categories of the female subject are identified with different facets of the erotic. Here, I am thinking of the ways in which the erotic constitutes Black and white women in different ways and the ramifications of this in terms of, for example, feminist interventions to confront sexual violence against women.

In the final section of this analysis, I make an application of this close re-reading of 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power' to issues of sexual violence against women. More specifically, the discussion uses a detailed textual analysis of Lorde's paper as a framework to make critical comment on the tools of intervention and thinking used in grappling the specificity of sexual violence against Black women. Hill Collins states that:

Moreover, analyzing questions of sexuality and power within an interpretive framework that takes intersecting oppressions into account can appear to be a daunting task. (Hill Collins, 2000:127)

I contend that ‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,’ for example, in thinking of the erotic as a bridge of connection (Lorde, 1978a:56), is relevant to this daunting task that is too frequently side-stepped.

Critical Social Theory of ‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power’

In what could be described as one of the most detailed evaluations of Lorde’s contribution to Black feminist thought, Rudolph Byrd states that:

...Lorde made...a new critical social theory that provides us with the grammar and vocabulary to describe and define difference and the complex nature of oppression. (Byrd, 2009:21)

‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power’ is an example of Black feminist critical social theory of the mutually constitutive relationship between affect, epistemology and subjectivity.

Lorde recognised ‘...the need to examine the processes whereby we naturalize personal experience and desire into general truth’ (Landry and Maclean, 1996:10). This is because the conceptual processes used in languages have:

...not fallen from the sky fully formed, and are no more inscribed in a *topos noētos*, than they are prescribed in the gray matter of the brain. (Derrida, 1972b:89; emphasis in original)

Derrida's reference to Plato's *topos noētos* is particularly relevant here because it concerns philosophical questions such as: what is knowledge? Where does knowledge reside? What is the function of knowledge? Lorde takes up these and other related questions with specific reference to the epistemology of the erotic. Bornedal explains that:

...*noein*, is commonly translated "thinking." But Heidegger suggests the other translation, "perceive," and emphasizes that such a perception is not the passive reception of the perceived. With *noein* as *perception*, there is an active element because what is perceived is specifically "taken-to-heart" (*Wahr-nehmen*). (Bornedal, 1997:76; italics and emphasis in original)

Lorde is particularly interested to expose the 'active element' in the erotic. Lorde confronts racist, homophobic, patriarchal thinking of the erotic that women 'take-to-heart' and proposes an alternative taking-to-heart, with a particular emphasis on the heart. For Lorde, the active element of perception should not involve a Cartesian dualism of mind and body.

In an interview with Kraft, Lorde speaks about the relationship between knowledge and emotion:

...the white fathers are the ones who have said "I think, therefore I am," having the concept that it is only through our thoughts, through our

intellectual, rational processes that we gain freedom. This is not true...That is, I believe, a real distortion of reality. I think that patriarchy has elevated the whole question of rationality to a point where it no longer has a context...we are now trapped in the age of rationality that has no vision at one end and has no acknowledgement of the true sources of self on the other...there has been a false emphasis in Western European thought upon what is rational and a total rejection of what is emotional. (Kraft, 1986:147-148)

It will become clear that the binary of the rational/non-rational that is 'a real distortion of reality' functions as part of a network that produces the effect of distortion.

Distortion is constituted within intersecting and mutually contingent binaries, such as the rational/non-rational '...fashioned within the context of male models of power' (Lorde, 1978a:53), so that:

...women are maintained at a distant/inferior position to be psychically milked, much the same way ants maintain colonies of aphids to provide a life-giving substance for their masters. (Lorde, 1978a:54)

The connotations conjured here of women as less than human, juxtaposed with the connotations conjured up within the non-rational, the intuitive and the emotional, produce a basis for treating women as objects and uncivilized animals. The dehumanization of women legitimizes sexual violence against women. The dehumanization of Black women legitimized/ legitimizes their sexual, emotional and physical enslavement. Black feminists such as Davis (1978), Hill Collins

(2000), hooks (1982) and Walker (1981, 1982) provide overwhelming documentation and theorization of:

Black women's portrayal in pornography as caged, chained, and naked creatures who possess "panther-like," savage, and exotic qualities...In a context where Whiteness as symbolic of both civilization and culture is used to separate objects from animals, racial difference constructed on the bedrock of sexuality becomes the distinguishing feature in determining the type of objectification women will encounter. (Hill Collins, 2000:139)

It is clear that processes of disconnection between women operate on every level in a 'divide and rule' strategy within the sexual objectification of women. Disconnected within our own bodies, sense of self and disconnected from each other:

...our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual's. (Lorde, 1978a:58)

Irigaray described the effect for women as:

...a masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own, and it leaves her in a familiar state of dependency upon man. Not knowing what she wants, ready for anything, even asking for more, so long as he will "take" her as his "object" when he seeks his own pleasure. (Irigaray, 1977:250)

In her opening statements, Lorde provides an outline of her treatise:

There are many kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise. The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives. (Lorde, 1978a:53)

Here, Lorde defines and identifies the erotic as a resource, a source of information and power; a type of power with the energy for change. She begins her address by establishing a close proximity to the women in the conference with emotional intimacy and immediacy. Lorde's performance is erotic. In doing this, Lorde is actively contesting the lack of proximity invoked through patriarchal constructions of the erotic. She is direct and quickly builds a personal identification that works both on the individual and the collective level: 'The erotic is a resource within each of us...' (Lorde, 1978a:53). In other words, everyone in the audience (those physically present and those 'of us' who go on to read and re-read the address) is included, both in terms of being constrained and released by the erotic.

As will become clearer later in this chapter, the technique of building a bridge across the differences in the room amongst the participants of the conference, through the uses of 'us,' 'we' and 'our,' juxtaposed with 'female' and 'women,' performs exactly what she is about to argue for - namely, interconnections. Lorde explains that: 'By "we" I mean not just the chosen few but all of us who are human' (Winter, 1976:12). Lorde's use of pronouns reflects

her passionate political belief in building bridges of collective action. Lorde outlines ‘uses of the erotic’ as a force for interconnection through the metaphor of a bridge that ‘lessens the threat’ of difference (Lorde, 1978a:56).

Precarious Positionality

As will become evident through this analysis, Lorde’s use of rhetorical devices and literary techniques both perform and embody the complexity of her message. However, the irresolvable inherent tension that is very apparent in ‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power’ and present in all of Lorde’s writing is that of proposing the interdependency of difference and non-hierarchical alliances, whilst advocating for recognition of the specificity of the lives of Black women and, at the same time, maintaining her precarious position as a writer, speaker and activist. The predicament is that Lorde imposes an authorial speaking position and undoes this position at the same time. This is exactly what she is doing with her examination of the erotic - she does and undoes the ‘uses of the erotic,’ and in doing so, she does and undoes ‘the erotic as power.’

Thus, the predicament of positionality is manifested in the message, the delivery of the message and the messenger. Derrida explains the complexity of this movement,

I am just *one* who, like others, is seeking his place, and who does not talk from an already identifiable place. When the voice vibrates, when one hears this voice one hears a voice which cannot be localized; it makes itself heard *because* the place of enunciation is not fixed . . . it is a

phantom-voice, a voice that searches for its place. (Derrida, 1983, cited in Bornedal, 1997:82; emphasis in original)

Eros

In negotiating her claims, Lorde traces the etymology of the erotic and invokes the characteristics, function and relationships of Eros outlined in Greek mythology. I propose that Lorde's use of this genre of mythology that is foundational to Western civilization, culture and philosophy is a deliberate literary strategy.

Firstly, the use of recognised mythical figures inherent in mainstream Western culture forms a connection with the audience through recognition of a familiar, known myth. This shared knowing and recognition is simultaneously disrupted, provoking the audience to revisit and question their knowing. The function of the myth, Arlow argues:

...constitutes a form of adaptation to reality and to the group in which the individual lives, and how it influences the crystallization of the individual identity and the formation of the superego. (Arlow, 1961, cited in Merkur, 2005:65)

Secondly, it enables Lorde to draw on a range of unearthly characters that are above and beyond the earthly interpellations of ideology. We are transported to the world of the mythical and that transportation, no matter how fleeting, kindles the possibility of other spaces.

Thirdly, the implications of this move enable her to invoke the non-rational, chaotic, mythic basis of the apparently rational culture and civilization that embraces Eros.

Fourthly, Lorde's reference to Eros enables her to demonstrate something about how distortion works - namely, the distortion of Eros. More specifically, it points to the aspects of the myth that support the key planks of her treatise. Lorde states:

The very word *erotic* comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects - born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce of women... (Lorde, 1978a:55; italics in original)

Thus, reference to Eros enables Lorde to establish a definition of the erotic which moves beyond the sexual. Lorde's re-working of the erotic through reference to the myth of Eros edges very close to mythopoesis and, as such, performs the creative potential of the erotic that she is arguing for.

Born of 'Chaos,' Eros, a daimon, exists between divinity and mortality representing an agent that bridges, connects and harmonises different elements on different planes. Thus, Eros seeks to operate simultaneously and seamlessly on spiritual, emotional, intellectual and material planes. Plato's Symposium represents Eros as a force for transformation that promotes wisdom, wholeness and unfolds gnosis. Aphrodite, the personification of freedom and equality, the mother of Eros, endows Eros with freedom from fear, the courage to face the unknown and the capacity to question conventions which threaten the creative processes of the mind. Lorde's epistemology of the erotic fuses fundamental

characteristics of the mythology of Eros with feminist political theory, and an analysis of subject formation, incarceration and emancipation. Keating cautions that:

This combination of politics, spirituality, and myth seems untenable to many contemporary academic critics...it implies a nostalgic world-view and a metaphysics - a synthesis of psychic, supernatural, and material forces - often dismissed as irrelevant to twentieth-century concerns. Because western-trained readers frequently equate tribal myths with superstitious beliefs, they regard mythico-religious systems as unsophisticated, inaccurate, and naive. (Keating, 1996:20)

‘Uses of the Erotic’: Fear

In this section of the analysis, I draw on Ahmed’s (2004) work on ‘the affective politics of fear’ which reflects ‘...the role of fear in the conservation of power...’ (Ahmed, 2004:64). The text of ‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power’ is structured through the use of repetition and an example of this can be seen in the word ‘fear.’ Lorde refers to the word ‘fear’ eight times (three of which are within one paragraph) during her paper, underscoring the use of ‘fear’ as one of the ‘uses of the erotic.’ However, Lorde does not use the word ‘fear’ in relation to being frightened of something monstrous or harmful; quite the opposite, Lorde refers to ‘fear’ in relation to a racist, homophobic patriarchal fear of ‘the erotic as a considered source of power’ (Lorde, 1978a:53) for women. Thus, the use of ‘fear’ is primarily to disconnect women from their source of energy, creativity and self-affirmation:

As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world, which values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which *fears* this same depth too much to examine the possibilities of it within themselves. (Lorde, 1978a:53-54; emphasis mine)

But the erotic offers a well of replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not *fear* its revelation, nor succumb to the belief that sensation is enough. (Lorde, 1978a:54; emphasis mine)

But giving in to the *fear* of feeling and working to capacity is a luxury only the unintentional can afford, and the unintentional are those who do not wish to guide their own destinies. (Lorde, 1978a:54; emphasis mine)

Another important way in which the erotic connection functions is the open and *fearless* underlining of my capacity for joy. (Lorde, 1978a:56; emphasis mine)

And that deep and irreplaceable knowledge of my capacity for joy comes to demand from all of my life that it be lived within the knowledge that such satisfaction is possible, and does not have to be called *marriage*, nor *god*, nor *an afterlife*. This is one reason why the erotic is so *feared*...? (Lorde, 1978a:57; my emphasis on 'feared')

We have been raised to *fear* the *yes* within ourselves, our deepest cravings. But, once recognised, those which do not enhance our future lose their power and can be altered. The *fear* of our desires keeps them suspect and indiscriminately powerful, for to suppress any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance. The *fear* that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile... (Lorde, 1978a:57-58; my emphasis on 'fear')

In all of these examples, Lorde uses 'fear' in relation to fear of the 'depth,' 'revelation,' 'replenishing and provocative force,' 'feelings,' 'capacity for joy,' 'cravings,' the 'nonrational,' the capacity to 'grow beyond' and 'the *yes* within ourselves.' It is clear from this tracing of the uses of 'fear' in the weave of the text that Lorde positions 'fear' on the side of patriarchal 'uses of the erotic.' Consequently, what is feared are women who '...are less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being...such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial' (Lorde, 1978a:58) because '...women so empowered are dangerous' (Lorde, 1978a:55).

'The affective politics of fear' (Ahmed, 2004) is a key strategy for delimiting vision and knowledge as a mechanism for the regulation and control of women. The importance of deconstructing the function of fear is explained by Massumi:

...if we are unable to separate ourselves from our fear, and if fear is a power mechanism for the perpetuation of domination, . . . our unavoidable participation in the capitalist culture of fear [may be] a complicity with our own and other's oppression. (Massumi, 1993, cited in Ngai, 2005:302)

Implicit is the relationship between fear, space and proximity found in Massumi's use of words such as 'separate,' 'unavoidable participation' and the notion of the inextricable link between 'our own and other's' subjugation through 'complicity.'

'Uses of the Erotic': Fear and Proximity

Both Ahmed (2004) and Lorde (1978a) explore the ways in which fear operates in relation to two specific axes; those of 'proximity' and 'anticipation.' The logic is that, because we fear the anticipated, we keep a distance; we don't get too near to the unknown. In turn, this regulates movement. It follows, therefore, that if the anticipated is to be kept at a distance to prevent close proximity, then this will influence, inform and affect movement, position and situation. Productions of the distortion of the erotic keep women at a distance from each other and from their own/collective creativity. Subsequently, productions of distortion function to make the notion and/or experience of difference suspect. Ahmed (2004) explains it in the following way:

Fear's relation to the object has an important temporal dimension: we fear an object that approaches us...Fear involves an *anticipation* of hurt or injury. Fear projects us from the present into a future...So the object that we fear is not simply before us, or in front of us, but impresses upon us in the present, as an anticipated pain in the future. (Ahmed, 2004:65; emphasis in original)

Ahmed turns to Heidegger for further clarification:

That which is detrimental, as something that threatens us, is not yet within striking distance, but it is coming close. . . . As it draws close, this "it can, and yet in the end it may not" becomes aggravated. We say, "It is

fearsome”. This implies that what is detrimental as coming-close close by carries with it the patent possibility that it may stay away and pass us by; but instead of lessening or extinguishing our fearing, this enhances it. (Heidegger, 1962, cited in Ahmed, 2004:65; ellipsis in original)

Crucially, Heidegger relates fear to that which is not present in either the spatial or temporal sense of the here and now. Both Ahmed and Heidegger speak about the idea that fear works on the basis of a terror of that which is ‘not yet within striking distance’; that is, an anticipated object to come. Furthermore, Heidegger talks about the enhancement or heightening of fear based on the anticipated, even though it may never materialise. This point is articulated by Lorde in the following way:

The fear of our desires keeps them suspect and indiscriminately powerful, for to suppress any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance. (Lorde, 1978a:57-58)

The point is that fear gains legitimacy through terror, anxiety and a phobia of the anticipated, of that which is unknown, unfamiliar and different. Proximity is key; no one wants to get too close or near to that which they are fearful of. This restricts movement, limits, regulates (becomes self-regulating of) position and maintains a fixity. This is not in keeping with the notion of a shifting, decentred, unanchored epistemology and subjectivity. This is not in keeping with the qualities, experience, knowledge and power necessary to lessen the threat of difference, to stretch out and build bridges with others. This delimited, fixed, distant position influences the vantage point for vision and looking. Haraway (1988) also asks some important questions in relation to vision and looking:

How to see? Where to see from? What limits to vision? What to see for? Whom to see with? Who gets to have more than one point of view? Who gets blinded? Who wears blinders? Who interprets the visual field? What other sensory powers do we wish to cultivate besides vision? (Haraway, 1988:289)

Interrogation of these questions requires close proximity to the concepts, positions and elements which have been kept at a distance. The theme of vision will be explored in more detail later. However, the relationship between power and seeing, anticipation and proximity to that which is unknown is apparent. Implicit in the questions posed by Haraway is that some are allowed, enabled to see and some are not, some have their vision restricted and some do not. Similarly, Ahmed concludes:

So the question of what is fearsome as well as who should be afraid is bound up with the politics of mobility, whereby the mobility of some bodies involves or even requires the restriction of the mobility of others. (Ahmed, 2004:70)

Butler comments:

This kind of questioning often engenders vertigo and terror over the possibility of losing social sanctions, of leaving a solid social station and place. That this terror is so well known gives the most credence to the notion that gender identity rests on the unstable bedrock of human invention. (Butler, 1987:27)

Outlining the necessity of re-interpreting the relationship between the notion of the subject and the notion of discourse, Irigaray points to the need for a

‘new perception and a new conception of *time* and *space*, our *occupation of place*...’ (Irigaray, 1987, cited in Shands, 1999:87; emphasis in original).

The themes of proximity, movement, position, situation and anticipation run throughout ‘Uses of The Erotic: The Erotic as Power’ (Lorde, 1978a). Firstly, here are some of examples of how Lorde brings in the concept of proximity (emphasis mine in all): ‘*short* step’ (53); ‘*context* of male models’ (53); ‘*distant/inferior*’ (54); ‘brings us *closest* to that fullness’ (55); ‘we are taught to *separate* the erotic’ (55); ‘attempts to *equate*’ (55); ‘nothing is *farther* from the truth’ (56); ‘forms a bridge *between* the sharers which can be a basis for understanding much of what is not shared *between* them’ (56).

Secondly, in relation to the idea of the anticipated/not known/not yet here, Lorde refers to: ‘not recognised’ (53), ‘unacknowledged’ (53), ‘possibilities’ (53), ‘revelation’ (54).

Finally, here are some examples of Lorde invoking the idea of regulated movement, position and situation can be found in the following excerpts (emphasis mine in all): ‘which fears this same *depth* too much’ (54), ‘*maintained at a distant/inferior* position’ (54), ‘we have *turned away from* the exploration (54)’, ‘to go beyond the encouraged mediocrity’ (54), ‘the unintentional are those who do not wish to guide their own destinies’ (54), ‘the way my body stretches to music and opens into response (56); ‘lived *within* the knowledge’ (57); ‘When released from its intense and constrained pellet, it flows’(57), ‘grow beyond . . . keeps us docile and loyal and obedient (58), ‘But within the european-american tradition . . . certain proscribed erotic comings-together’ (59).

These selections of text show the complexity of Lorde's engagement with space, movement and position. However, I would argue that although her rhetorical devices function to question space, movement and position, this is achieved at the expense of claiming an alternative space, movement and position. The issue with taking a position in the act of undoing a position is bound up with the aporia of positionality. Gates, Jr. puts it well:

They knew just how to keep us in our place. And the logic was breathtakingly simple: If you win, you lose. (Gates, Jr., 1992, cited in Minh-ha, 2011:48)

All positions are implicated and this is why 'If you win, you lose.' Thus, rather than concentrating on finding or describing a position, it may be far more politically circumspect to occupy the implicated position of deconstructing the logic, production and function of mechanisms that 'keep us in our place.'

'Uses of the Erotic': The Spatial Politics of Fear

In relation to the specific ways in which fear regulates movement and orchestrates a particular relationship between the body, the psyche and the world, both Lorde (1978a) and Ahmed (2004) refer to the capacity for being 'open' or 'openness.' Lorde states:

Another important way in which the erotic connection functions is the *open* and fearless underlying of my capacity for joy. In the way my body stretches to music and *opens* into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also *opens* to the erotically satisfying experience... (Lorde, 1978a:56; emphasis mine)

Notice Lorde puts together ‘open and fearless’ in her description of how the erotic functions. Conversely, Ahmed explains how fear operates precisely not to open up:

...openness itself is read as a site of potential danger, and as demanding evasive action. Emotions may involve *readings of such openness*, as spaces where bodies and worlds meet and leak into each other. Fear involves reading such openings as dangerous; the openness of the body to the world involves a sense of danger, which is *anticipated as a future pain or injury*...Fear involves shrinking the body; *it restricts the body's mobility precisely insofar as it seems to prepare the body for flight*. (Ahmed, 2004:69; emphasis in original)

Here, Ahmed makes the link between reading openness and shrinking containment that results in a ‘spatial politics of fear’ (Ahmed, 2004:69). Ahmed uses this link to develop a feminist analysis of how women are restricted within social spaces. Taking up the constituent elements of fear including the representation of women’s bodies, the demand for retreat as the body recoils and shrinks, and the subsequent shrinking of social space, Ahmed concludes that:

Vulnerability is not an inherent characteristic of women’s bodies; rather, it is an effect that works to secure femininity as a delimitation of movement in the public, and over-inhabitation in the private. (Ahmed, 2004:70)

Similarly, Lorde speaks about how particular spaces, including the private, are delimited in: ‘...the erotic so feared, and so often relegated to the bedroom alone...’ (Lorde, 1978a:57). The restriction of women’s access to certain spaces legitimates an artificial separation between public and private, and between

legitimate and illegitimate mobility, producing a binary which Lorde's reclamation of the erotic seeks to challenge.

In relation to the binary between public and private spaces, and how this particular binary constitutes subjectivity and manages differences, Grosz (1995) pushes the analysis further. Speaking about lesbianism specifically and discourses about the erotic, desire and women's sexuality in general Grosz talks about the:

...split between what one is and what one does that produces the very possibility of a notion like "the closet," a distinction between private and public that refuses integration. (Grosz, 1995:225)

The split between public and private serves as a key element preserving 'regimes of sexuality' (Grosz, 1995:217). This 'codification and control of sexuality' (Grosz, 1995:221) functions to legitimize sexual violence against women exemplified in continuing legal and policy battles in relation to rape, immigration and the physical, emotional and material implications of domestic abuse. It is clear from the wealth of feminist scholarship in this area that the binary of public/private operates to control and constrain what is heard/unheard, seen/unseen in relation to women's voices, evidence and representations (Burman, 2005; Cowling and Reynolds, 2004; Horvath and Brown, 2009; James, 2012; Palmary et al., 2010; Siddiqui et al., 2008).

Throughout her paper, Lorde shifts between, and outlines, the inextricable links between physical and social spaces, and mobility and psychic spaces. Anzaldúa comments that:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along

a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (Anzaldúa, 2007:25; emphasis in original)

Re-reading Anzaldúa in the light of Butler's questions about delimitation enables an analysis of delimiting norms, power and vision as a function of borders. Butler asks:

...how do normative gender presumptions work to delimit the very field of description that we have for the human? What is the means by which we come to see this delimiting power, and what are the means by which we transform it? (Butler, 1990a:99)

In the following extracts, Lorde uses the idea of a reclaimed erotic to challenge the spatial politics of fear that regulates her movements and access to space:

...so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea. (Lorde, 1978a:56)

There is a difference between painting a back fence and writing a poem, but only one of quantity. And there is, for me, no difference between writing a good poem and moving into sunlight against the body of a woman I love. (Lorde, 1978a:58)

Here, the erotic intersects the physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual. The sunlight is not confined to a public or private space, but transcends spatial and temporal enclosure where an openness to 'the woman I love' is bright light, warm and poetic. Lorde builds bookcases, writes poetry and analyses concepts, transgressing fixed categories of women's work and women's space. In contrast

to the spatial politics of fear, Lorde provides a feminist analysis of the ways in which intersubjective connections could bridge differences, cross dichotomous borders and transgress boundaries prescribed by a patriarchal epistemology of the erotic.

Boyce Davies comments that the work of Black feminists, including Lorde, participate:

...in a growing collage of up-rising textualities. Their works exist more in the realm of the “elsewhere” of diasporic imaginings than the precisely locatable. (Boyce Davies, 1994:88)

Lorde’s treatise on the erotic can be read as a treatise outlining the erotic as a force for interdependency, for connection and for a mutual sharing, with the potential for transformational emancipatory change. In her concluding remarks to her address, Lorde states that: ‘This deep participation has often been the forerunner for joint concerted actions not possible before’ (Lorde, 1978a:59). Here, Lorde is not just giving voice to a vision yet to be realised, but, rather, she is indicating that ‘the erotic as power’ as feminist praxis already exists within the “elsewhere” of diasporic imaginings’ (Boyce Davies, 1994:88).

‘Uses of the Erotic’: Binaries

The following examples illustrate the various ways in which Lorde questions binaries and resonate with Anzaldúa’s analysis of the relationship between borders, spaces, definition and constitution of subjectivity:

There are frequent attempts to equate pornography and eroticism, two diametrically opposed uses of the sexual. Because of these attempts, it has become fashionable to separate the spiritual (psychic and emotional) from

the political, to see them as contradictory or antithetical. “What do you mean, a poetic revolutionary, a mediating gunrunner?” In the same way, we have attempted to separate the spiritual and the erotic, thereby reducing the spiritual to a world of flattened affect... (Lorde, 1978a:55-56)

Lorde uses the text performatively, transgressing the boundaries of identity categories and crossing the borders of apparent contradiction. However, in contesting ‘attempts to equate pornography and eroticism, two diametrically opposed uses of the sexual,’ Lorde is in danger of reinstating the very binary she seeks to undo. Lorde is in danger of proposing a construction of the erotic that precludes the ‘contradictory or antithetical.’

Of course, pornography functions to objectify women, but the challenge for feminist movements that confront violence against women is one of occupying a position that objects to pornography, whilst occupying what Doyle (2006) refers to as the ‘dialectics of desire.’ Occupation of the dialectic of the erotic would acknowledge the joy, connectivity and bridge of sharing proposed by Lorde, whilst acknowledging the painful disconnection, and the disorientating space and experience of the erotic.

In thinking about the ‘dialectic of desire,’ I find Ngai’s (2005:333) analysis of ‘...the striking asymmetry between the careers of disgust and desire in literary and cultural theory...’ particularly useful. Ngai proposes that the asymmetry between ugly feelings and attractive feelings is in their construction and function. Ngai’s analysis of disgust and desire provide a useful theoretical lens to scrutinise Lorde’s contrasting descriptions of the erotic as ‘...the psychotic, the plasticized sensation...the pornographic’ (Lorde, 1978a:54), and ‘...the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge’ (Lorde, 1978a:56).

This is an example of where Lorde uses contrast as a political rhetorical device to separate racist, homophobic patriarchal constructions from feminist constructions of ‘uses of the erotic.’ However, Lorde’s separation occludes layers of complexity alluded to in Ngai’s analysis. This point is imperative to the activism of feminist theory, where communication of political imperatives can fail to take into account layers of complexity that cast a shadow over clear, authoritative political messages. Ngai points out that:

Even if disgust is boiled down to its kernel of repulsion, repulsion itself tends to be a fairly definite response, whereas the parameters of attraction are notoriously difficult to determine and fix. Put simply, desire seems capable of being vague, amorphous, and even idiosyncratic in ways that disgust cannot. (Ngai, 2005:335)

Following the direction of Ngai’s line of enquiry, the totalizing effect of the objectification of Black women examined later on in this chapter can be seen as an effect of repulsion working through the pornographic. In other words, the characteristic of disgust and repulsion to ‘determine and fix’ functions to totalize. Critical analysis of the asymmetry between different versions of the erotic proposed by Lorde can open up an inquiry into the function and production of the erotic ‘...as that which gives rise to subjectivity, rather than following on from it’ (Frosh and Baraitser, 2009:159).

Lorde brings together two elements that are opposed to each other. The poetic revolutionary and the mediating gunrunner summon up powerful images of Anzaldúa’s (2007) borderland identities, banished to the borderlands because anticipation of that which is different requires decreased proximity. Lorde explains that ‘The dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is also false,

resulting from an incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge’ (Lorde, 1978a:56). Lorde’s argument here and throughout her paper reflects the style of a proselytising sermon.

The tension is in summoning the power and impact of a sermon whilst being on guard against fundamentalist, fixed positions of certainty that so often characterize sermons set out to convert the audience. It could be argued that Lorde’s repetitive references to, and connotations of, ‘corrupt or distort’ (Lorde, 1978a:53), ‘the false belief’ (Lorde, 1978a:53) and the ‘misnamed’ (Lorde, 1978a:54) function to establish the legitimacy and efficacy of a holy, divine canonical truth, light and way. For example, in claiming that the erotic is the bridge between the spiritual and the political, Lorde states that it ‘...is the first and most powerful guiding light toward any understanding’ (Lorde, 1978a:56). Reminiscent of an act of faith, increased proximity, increased mobility and challenging the spatial politics of fear, encountering difference demands a leap into the unknown creation of an epistemology which is counter to ‘...a racist, patriarchal and anti-erotic society’ (Lorde, 1978a:59).

In her interview with Kraft (1986), Lorde describes how she draws on African and Caribbean legends to represent how crossing borders of binary division enables alternate knowledge systems:

MK: In *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power* you described the erotic as one of the sources of power and knowledge in our lives.

AL: The Power of the Erotic, the Uses of Anger, we must not run from these parts as women...we must be able to acknowledge all of the parts of ourselves...it is the West African women of Dahomey who have the legend, who have the belief and who demonstrate this, that there is not a

contradiction between the taking of lives and the giving of life, and the making of war, so that you have your Dahomeyan amazons who were the fiercest warriors of king...in the lives of so many Afro-American women, my mother, my mother's generation, I saw that these women were nurturing, they were cherishing, they were loving, but they were also really tough warriors, you know. (Kraft, 1986:148-149; italics in original)

The mediating gunner and the poetic revolutionary are not just literary devices intended to parody dichotomous couplets. Lorde is drawing on a range of mythical elements from Dahomey to ancient Greece to illustrate the power of the erotic to operate harmoniously on a range of levels with a range of elements, including the spiritual and the material.

Tracking Lorde's movements in the text performs both the connection and disconnection of the erotic. For example, Lorde moves between the positions of distant and close proximity in her use of questions. This is illustrated in her position as narrator. Lorde manipulates the use and position of voice, occupies the space of imagination, and moves between the use of singular and collective pronouns, leaving all implicated. Lorde's complex semantic arrangement mirrors the processes of denial and suppression of the erotic, with particular emphasis on the role of compartmentalisation and dichotomous binary divisions. It could be argued that the struggles Lorde grapples with in trying to find and occupy an emancipatory erotic anticipate the struggles of current debates about the construction of desire, the erotic and representations of 'proscribed erotic comings-together'(Lorde, 1978a:59).

‘Uses of the Erotic’ in Confronting Violence against Women

In this section of the chapter, I apply ‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power’ as an analytic framework to explore an account of gender violation experienced by Hill Collins (2000). I take up this particular account because it includes the lived experience of gender violation and detailed testimony of that violation.

In using Lorde as a framework to investigate Hill Collins’ experience, my intention is to demonstrate that the activism of Black feminist theory in general, and the activism of Lorde in particular, provide powerful and effective tools for confronting gender violence. Although I make reference to gender violence, my specific focus is on violence against Black women. My use of Black feminist thinking to examine the complex intersection of multiple complex vectors of oppression in the sexual denigration of Black women is quite deliberate.

The point I am making here is that any hope of meaningful alliances across difference to combat gender violence will fail if Black feminist interventions, wisdom and experience continue to be marginalised. Furthermore, they will fail if any element in those alliances replicate the unequal power relations at work in gender violence through hegemonic thinking and positioning in those alliances, thereby replicating the very problem they seek to address.

The tools we use, why and how we use them, what we leave out and what we include, and the connections we make between tools, reflect power relations. Keating identifies the relevance of Lorde’s work as an effective tool of critical intervention in contemporary issues:

...Lorde's theory of the erotic enables her to unite alternate ways of thinking with material change: The erotic makes it possible to develop "new ways of understanding our experiences. This is how new visions begin, how we begin to posit a future nourished by the past..." (Keating, 1996:49)

Keating also refers to Lorde's approach as a transformational epistemology using performative threshold locations (Keating, 1996:4) to '...move beyond the existing frameworks by exposing the hidden, masculine, Eurocentric biases that structure binary thinking' (Keating, 1996:6-7).

Objectify Myself: Objectify Her

Writing about the sexual politics of Black womanhood with particular reference to violence against Black women, Hill Collins comments:

...I was invited to objectify myself in order to develop the objectivity that would allow me to participate in her objectification. (Hill Collins, 2000:142)

The context in which this comment was made refers to three separate occasions where Hill Collins was part of the audience in which three different academic scholars (a white feminist, a white male and a black male) used Sarah Bartmann's image (Clifton and Scully, 2008; Qureshi, 2004; Willis, 2010). Hill Collins states the issues very clearly:

...I saw the reactions of young Black women who saw images of Sarah Bartmann for the first time...They saw and felt the connections among the

women exhibited on the auction block, the voyeuristic treatment of Sarah Bartmann, the depiction of Black women in pornography, and their own daily experiences of being under sexual surveillance. (Hill Collins, 2000:141-142)

When Hill Collins questioned the ‘prominent White scholar’ (Hill Collins, 2000:142) about his pornographic use of the presentation slides,

He defended his “right” to use public domain material any way he saw fit, even if it routinely offended Black women and contributed to their continued objectification. (Hill Collins, 2000:142)

The ‘prominent Black male scholar’ (Hill Collins, 2000:142), who made no mention of Sarah Bartmann’s gender ‘Despite the fact that we stared at a half-naked Black woman’ (Hill Collins, 2000:142), responded to Hill Collins, “‘I’m concerned about race here, not gender!’” (Hill Collins, 2000:142). These encounters encompass the complexity of the politics and practice of entering into a dialogue across difference, where issues of race, gender and sexual violence intersect.

In particular, Hill Collins highlights how the mechanism of objectification works across, and through, subjectivity and inter-subjectivity to regulate, constitute and construct power relations that shape encounters about gender violence between men and men, women and men, and women and women. Furthermore, Hill Collins demonstrates how the mechanisms of objectification work across temporal and spatial contexts.

Interconnections: Relations of Proximity

This section of the chapter uses the interventions of Black feminist theory in relation to interconnections, intersectionality, binary positions and representation as tools of critical analysis to deconstruct discourses and practices that legitimize violence against women.

Furthermore, I use the conceptual tools developed within Black feminist theory both as the subject and method of enquiry. For example, intersectionality conceptualises interlocking and mutually reinforcing vectors (Crenshaw, 1989; Nash, 2008) that could refer to public, private, gender, silence, body and family.

Referring specifically to sexual violence against Black women, Hill Collins argues for an analysis of sexual violence in the context of all systems of oppression because:

This conceptualization views sexuality as conceptual glue that binds intersecting oppressions together. Stated differently, intersecting oppressions share certain core features. Manipulating and regulating the sexualities of diverse groups constitutes one such shared feature or site of intersectionality. (Hill Collins, 2000:135)

However, even though there is an intersection of issues, elements and mechanisms that legitimizes violence against women, current politics and practice of confronting violence against women is not interconnected. This lack of connection is exacerbated in the politics, discourse and representation of sexual violence against Black women. Crenshaw explains that:

Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling (Crenshaw, 1991:1242)

Here, Crenshaw's point is that binary positions, fragmentation and splitting that work to silence survivors of gender violence become replicated within the politics and practice of challenging violence against women.

Political, practical and policy solutions to tackle violence against women need to be founded on the interdependency of difference (Anzaldúa, 2007; Burman, 2004; Butler, 2004; Krizsan, et al., 2012; Lorde, 1980a; Schiek and Lawson, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2006). In other words, the concept and practice of interconnection is central to understanding and working to confront gender violence. Hill Collins explains that:

For Black women, ceding control over self-definitions of Black women's sexualities upholds multiple oppressions. This is because all systems of oppression rely on harnessing the power of the erotic. (Hill Collins, 2000:128)

I propose that Black feminist theory born out of intersecting subjugated knowledge in the matrix of power (Hill Collins, 2000) offers a 'politics of location' (Boyce Davies, 1994:153; Kaplan, 1994) that is pivotal to negotiating interdisciplinary, inter-subjective, psychic, emotional, political and practical solutions to the problems of gender violence. I argue that critical analysis of '...relations of proximity [that] highlight the facts of connection or

dis/connection' (Probyn, 2003:294; Ahmed, 2000) is central to finding new meanings, solutions and tools to confront violence against women.

Lorde and Hill Collins' Encounter

I return to the experience of Hill Collins quoted earlier because her identification of the propositions at work in the dynamics of her experience are precisely the propositions at work in the dynamics of the subjugation of women through sexual violation. Hill Collins (2000) describes a particular encounter that brings her into a particular proximity to another Black woman - namely, Sarah Bartmann. I want to offer an encounter of Hill Collins' experience through a particular proximity to 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power.'

The rationale for using this particular framework of analysis is, firstly, that Lorde's paper on the erotic as power provides a feminist analysis of the intersection of objectification, the politics of location and disconnection as key props in the foundation of racist, homophobic, patriarchal constructions of the erotic. The point here is that these are the same props used in racist, homophobic, patriarchal constructions of the cause and sanctioning of gender violence.

Secondly, the juxtaposition of Hill Collins and Lorde offers an encounter between two Black women that is in stark contrast to the one Hill Collins was invited to participate in with Bartmann.

In other words, the analysis and the tools used here offer a connection that does not trade on objectification and, in doing so, demonstrates an alternative non-objectifying connection. Non-objectifying connections offered, developed and

lived through the activism of Black feminist theory stand in defiance of the connections that trade on the process of objectification described by Hill Collins. These trade-offs are present in too many accounts by survivors of gender violence, and are failed to be addressed in analyses and interventions designed to confront gender violence.

Thirdly, in the spirit of reassessing the tool box available to confront gender violence, I want to demonstrate that Black feminist tools developed in the 1970s (Lorde wrote her paper in 1978) work alongside tools developed in 1990 and 2000 (Hill Collins). My point is that interventions to confront sexual violence against women must use all feminist resources available across space and time.

Productions of Distortion

...I was invited to objectify myself in order to develop the objectivity that would allow me to participate in her objectification. (Hill Collins, 2000:142)

Here, Hill Collins presents a sequence involving three main propositions contingent upon the first proposition:

- I objectify myself – I distort myself
- I develop objectivity – distorted thinking
- I participate in her objectification – distortion of her

Examination of this sequence reveals that Hill Collins has to distort herself and her thinking as a condition for the distortion of Bartmann. Hill Collins is invited

to subject herself to the same process of objectification that Bartmann is subjected to and, as will become evident this invitation, is a crucial aspect of the process.

Furthermore, the distortion of Bartmann into an object is the distortion of Hill Collins into an object and, ultimately, the distortion of all Black women into objects. What is performed here is the construction of the objectification of the Black woman produced through a repetitive chain of distortions. What is demonstrated here is the function of the construction of the distortion.

The point is not the fact of the distortion; indeed, to rest on this alone would be a distraction and diversion from the crux of the matter - namely, the production of the construction of distortion and what this production functions to do; nor is this to imply that there could be no distortion.

Furthermore, the inquiry into the function and production of the construction would do well to include questions of who and what is foreclosed, and who and what is privileged, in the construction. Butler explains that:

...construction is neither a subject nor its act, but a process of reiteration by which both “subjects” and “acts” come to appear at all. There is no power that acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability. (Butler, 1993a:9)

‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power’ repeatedly refers to distortion as a mechanism of the ‘reiterated acting that is power.’ Lorde’s use of the rhetorical device of repetition performatively re-inscribes the relationship between distortion and reiteration:

In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. (Lorde, 1978a:53)

...that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression as women. (Lorde, 1978a:58)

...this misnaming of the need and the deed give rise to that distortion which results in pornography and obscenity... (Lorde, 1978a:59)

In other words, distortion functions as a mechanism to sustain and extend oppression. However, the rigour of the analysis and its translation into effective feminist interventions lie in being suspicious of anything that claims to have escaped distortion.

Setting up the polarities of the ‘distorted’ and the ‘not distorted’ may function as a political tactic of the ‘...*strategic* use of positivist essentialism...’ (Spivak, 2006:281; emphasis in original). However, failure of the tactic lies in the transformation of the essentialist from a strategy to a claim of representation. This point is made by Spivak in her explanation of two meanings of the word ‘representation’:

Treading in your shoes, wearing your shoes, that’s *Vertretung*. Representation in that sense: political representation. *Darstellung-Dar*, there, same cognate. *Stellen*, is to place, so “placing there.” *Representing*: proxy and portrait...Now, the thing to remember is that in the act of

representing politically, you actually represent yourself and your constituency in the portrait sense, as well. (Spivak, 1990:108; italics and emphasis in original)

Making an application of Spivak's two meanings of 'representation' to the issue of distortion, it would seem that distortion by proxy or 'treading in the shoes of' Bartmann would enable a discourse and analysis of the pornographic objectification of her body, whilst holding on to the temporal and spatial instability of 'treading in' the shoes of indeterminate perspectives. For example, the body of Bartmann is not in fact distorted. The distortion is a product of, and produces the, reiterated acts of the abuse of power. The body of Bartmann is 'treading in the shoes of distortion' and any analysis of the 'representation' of her body in the shoes of distortion must be from a position of 'treading in the shoes of' '...conventions of representational realism' (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1996:15). However, a 'placing there' of distortion, so that Bartmann is represented as distorted, and the portrait of a distorted Bartmann, functions to produce a fixed, concrete, essentialist identification of Bartmann as the personification of distortion.

Spivak's point, however, is not a reductionist proxy/portrait binary. Spivak contends that although it is important to understand the difference between essentialist and anti-essentialist positions, it is not possible to deconstruct 'the treading in the shoes of' without simultaneously deconstructing the essentialist position that these are the true authentic shoes, my shoes and the only shoes. This would be tantamount to claiming that if the shoe fits, then the true subject of the shoe has been located. Landry and MacLean summarise the predicament

succinctly: ‘The critique of essentialism is predicated upon essentialism’ (Landry and Maclean, 1996:7).

The Totalizing Effect of Distortion

Distortion is effective because it serves to mask, disavow and censor the existence, space and energy for the disruption and destabilization of oppression. This is precisely why Butler thinks:

...conceptions of constructions is a return to the notion of matter not as a site or surface, but as *a process of materialisation that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter.* (Butler, 1993a:9; emphasis in original)

The temporal and spatial, fixed (in both senses of the word - immobile and contrived) matter of Black women’s bodies produces fixed, degrading, obscene, shameful objectifications that legitimize sexual violence. Ngai explains that:

...disgust is never ambivalent about its object. More specifically, it is never prone to producing the confusions between subject and object...disgust strengthens and polices this boundary. (Ngai, 2005:335)

The totalizing disgust of the obscene Black woman functions to fix ‘...its object as “intolerable,” disgust undeniably has been and will continue to be instrumentalized in oppressive and violent ways (Ngai, 2005:340). Incorporating the process of stabilization imprisons women within the ‘*boundary, fixity*’ (Butler, 1993a:9; emphasis in original) of docility, obedience and loyalty with no apparent alternative position. The repetitive action of performativity continues as

'*boundary, fixity*' becomes translated into women's compliance in sexual violence.

Williams' (1995) analysis demonstrates something of how the '*boundary, fixity*' works with specific reference to objectification:

A habit of thinking that permits the imagination of the voyeur to indulge in auto-sensation that obliterates the subjectivity of the observed. A habit of thinking that allows that self-generated sensation to substitute for interaction with a whole other human being, to substitute for listening or conversing or caring...the object is pacified, a malleable "thing" upon which to project. (Williams, 1995:123)

Here, Williams' use of 'a habit of thinking' resonates with Butler's (1993:9) 'reiterated acting that is power' and the 'auto-sensation that obliterates the subjectivity of the observed' (Williams, 1995:123) resonates with Lorde's rejection of '...using another's feelings as we would use a kleenex' (Lorde, 1978a:58).

Objectification is a mechanism that forges 'false and treacherous connections' (Lorde, 1980a:115) through a process of disconnection based on distortion. This is illustrated in the disconnection of sensation from feeling, and the disconnection of 'self-generated sensation' from 'interaction with a other whole human being' (Williams, 1995:123). In accordance with Williams' analysis, Lorde concludes that 'Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling' (Lorde, 1978a:54). Lorde is clear that 'The erotic cannot be felt secondhand' (Lorde, 1978a:59).

These intersecting distortions become an incorporated norm that ‘...qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility’ (Butler, 1993a:2). However the terms of viability are simultaneously the terms for lack of viability. Lack of viability of Black women as human beings ‘within the domain of cultural intelligibility’ is well-documented by Black feminists (Davis, 1978, 1981; Hill Collins, 2000:123-148; hooks, 1982; Walker, 1981:41-53; Walker, 1982).

The Invitation

...I was invited to objectify myself in order to develop the objectivity that would allow me to participate in her objectification. (Hill Collins, 2000:142)

Other components of the sentence above open up further lines of enquiry, and it is worth dwelling upon these because the issues raised are the issues that Lorde is concerned with. They are issues that are fundamental to our understanding of the mechanisms used in sexual violence against women and the development of emancipatory interventions to confront this pernicious problem.

Hill Collins (2000) uses words that simultaneously invoke her subjectivity and position her subjectivity in relation to Bartmann. The uses of ‘I,’ ‘me,’ ‘myself’ and ‘her’ identify and locate the subjectivity of Hill Collins and Bartmann as the conduit for the process of objectification. This stands in contrast to the invitation which has no pronoun. Hill Collins states that ‘I was invited.’ Here, the lack of a pronoun, the use of the passive voice and no- named, identified

inviter leave the 'invited' unfixed. In other words, the initiator of the invitation is left open. Thus, the invitation could be epistemology, social constructions, social sanctions and/or representations.

The questions that could be asked, and indeed, are frequently asked by women survivors of sexual violence, are: Does invitation imply choice? Does the choice invoked in the invitation designate responsibility? Survivors of gender violence are left feeling that: if I am invited and chose to take up the invitation, then I am responsible for the consequences of the invitation. The invitation locates shame and blame with the survivor of sexual violence and not with the originator of the invitation, nor with the invitation itself. The invitation situates responsibility in the subjectivity of the survivor of sexual violence. This keeps the process of objectification alive so that self-blame becomes self-objectification, which in turn, becomes a significant block to the self-connection that is so vital to the recovery process.

Objectification causes emotional, psychological and physical fragmentation because the self becomes too contemptible to be in proximity with. This condition of self-abhorrence, self-blame and overwhelming shame creates disintegration and prevents a sense of self-connection that is crucial to the recovery process. However, I would argue, and here is where I would question Lorde's proposal, that the challenge for feminist thinking and interventions is to hold on to a rigorous analytic framework in order to track the manoeuvres of distortion. For example, the notion that distortion resides and functions only in disconnection would foreclose analysis of the location and function of distortion within self-connection.

Lorde argues that the process of disconnection functions to distort and suppress the erotic in order to prevent women from using the erotic as a source of power, revelation and transformation:

The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. (Lorde, 1978a:54)

Close scrutiny of the language used by Lorde and Hill Collins indicates that this process of distortion is a construction; Hill Collins says, 'in order to develop' and Lorde says, 'It has been made into.' In other words, there is a deliberate manipulation occurring that these two, and many other Black feminists, seek to identify, expose and challenge. Furthermore, the words 'develop' and 'made into' open up the possibility of a different 'develop' and a different 'made into,' leaving room for social change, emancipatory interventions, imagination and activism.

Further close scrutiny of the words used by Hill Collins indicates further elements that intersect to produce a powerful package of distortion, objectification and regulation. Her use of the word 'objectivity' invokes the idea of an obtainable position of impartiality and neutrality, conjuring up the notion of a truth contingent upon fairness. The word 'objectivity' functions to resist questioning, because to question that which has a claim of objectivity would be to question fairness, impartiality and neutrality.

The psychological and emotional impact of this sequence is interrogated by the 'The Duluth Model: Social Change to End Violence Against Women,

Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs (DAIP)' (1980) and articulated within the Duluth 'Power and Control Wheel.' The Duluth programme discusses how the claim to 'objectivity' is used by those who abuse power over women through sexual and domestic violation in order to distort perception. The consequence of distorted perception is self-doubt and a lack of trust in cognitive functioning. This results in confusion, fear, dependency and deep internal disconnection. Lorde describes the process in the following way:

As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world, which values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which fears this same depth too much to examine the possibilities of it within themselves. So women are maintained at a distant/inferior position to be psychically milked, much the same way ants maintain colonies of aphids to provide a life-giving substance for their masters. (Lorde, 1978a:53-54)

The unequal power relation that Lorde refers to is picked up in Hill Collins' use of the word 'allow.' Connotations of the word 'allow' invoke a power dynamic between the 'allowed' and that which, or who, 'allows.' This power dynamic conjures up the conditions upon which being 'allowed' depends, and gives rise to the notion of a border and criteria for crossing the border. To 'allow' is not the same as to enable or to empower. Interestingly, Hill Collins places the passive 'allow' with the active 'participate' in which she is invited to be active. This implies more than a reductionist regime of visibility. In other words, 'allow me to participate in her objectification' involves more than Hill Collins' looking at Bartmann.

Just as racism operating within the regime of visibility has nothing and everything to do with the colour of skin (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000a), sexual violence against women, such as rape, pornography, sexual abuse, prostitution, forced marriage and Female Genital Mutilation, has nothing and everything to do with sex and the erotic (Lorde, 1978a). In other words:

The parallels between distortions of deep human feelings in racial oppression and of the distortions of the erotic in sexual oppression are striking. (Hill Collins, 2000:171)

Participation brings to mind all of the implications of Butler's theory of performativity, and the repetitive re-inscribing of identity categories, subjectivity and positioning. Hill Collins' use of the word 'participation' invokes the ways in which racism and sexism intersect through mechanisms of representation as a tool of oppression. The role and meaning of 'participation' are significant components of the self-blame, self-hatred and self-disconnection that survivors of sexual violation grapple with, and have to confront in the process of recovery.

Disconnection and Connection

Any intervention or analysis, whether packaged in the form of policy, activism or scholarship in response to a problem, needs to have a detailed understanding of the mechanics of that problem - namely, how and why it works. Lorde argues that racist, homophobic, patriarchal formulations of the erotic function to suppress detailed critical analysis:

...suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives. (Lorde, 1978a:53)

...we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. (Lorde, 1978a:54)

Here, Lorde's point is that the erotic is the source of critical enquiry, so that suppression of the erotic is, by definition, the suppression of detailed critical analysis. The trick of the distortion of the erotic is that 'confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic,' means that the source of critical analysis to enable women to be 'less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being...such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial' is where it is least expected (Lorde, 1978a:58).

In other words, who would look to the pornographic as 'our most profoundly creative source' (Lorde, 1978a:59)? Who would think of 'the pornographic, the abused, and the absurd' (Lorde, 1978a:59), and 'the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation' (Lorde, 1978a:54) as 'a well of replenishing and provocative force' (Lorde, 1978a:54) to women? In a racist, homophobic patriarchy such juxtapositions would appear to be non-rational and chaotic. However, uncovering the mechanisms by which 'We have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued within western society' (Lorde, 1978a:53) is precisely the task of breaking silence about sexual violence against women.

Indeed, a significant part of the journey of recovery for women survivors of sexual violence is being able to trust that 'uses of the erotic' that wield 'power *over*' can be displaced by 'uses of the erotic' in a form of 'power *to*.' It should be

noted that the notions of ‘power *over*’ and ‘power *to*’ that I am using here pick up on particular discourses of power that are used within some feminist activist contexts, primarily with specific reference to confronting sexual violence (Allen, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c; Elshtain, 1982; Yoder and Kahn, 1992).

Moving from Generality to Specificity

I propose that Lorde’s feminist use of the erotic provides a rigorous framework for enabling ‘the transformation of silence into language and action’ (Lorde, 1977a:40) that is vital for survivors of sexual violence. Lorde states that:

...the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. (Lorde, 1978a:54)

Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives...not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe. (Lorde, 1978a:57)

The therapeutic potential of feminist consciousness-raising works in direct relation to ‘how acutely and fully’ we collectively and honestly scrutinise the discourse, behaviours and impact of sexual violence. For example, in relation to gender violence, this could represent moving from the ‘general’ to the ‘specific.’ Too often, therapeutic and political interventions in relation to women’s experiences of sexual violence fail to get close to the specificity of those experiences. Lorde argues that ‘[t]he erotic is a measure’ (Lorde, 1978a:54), and

application of this in terms of moving from the general to the specific is vital for a number of reasons.

Firstly, staying with the ‘general’ is used to silence the ‘specific,’ creating a barrier to survivors speaking out about the particular acts and processes they have endured, and continue to endure. Generalities skim over the specificities of the horrors of sexual violation.

Secondly, overt and subtle resistance to interrogating the specific mechanisms used in the control and regulation of women subjected to gender violence reaffirms the survivor’s sense of shame, blame and disconnection. The logic becomes that the unnameable must remain unnameable because it is so abhorrent.

Thirdly, resistance to naming the specific acts and processes used in gender violence confirms to the survivor that the experience needs to remain hidden and silenced in order not to contaminate others.

Finally, resting within the ‘psychic retreat’ (Steiner, 1993:1) of generalities is to be complicit with, and to maintain distance from, the destructive consequences of disconnection. The disconnection ‘...puts woman in the position of experiencing herself only fragmentarily...’ (Irigaray, 1977:254), and maintains her isolation from others.

Understanding the issue of sexual violence against women requires detailed deconstruction of the constituent components of the mechanisms used within this violation. The component of disconnection is central both in terms of the process of the abuse of power and in relation to the trauma experienced as a

result of that abuse. Examination of disconnection under the analytic lens of Lorde's (1978a) work indicates that the component of disconnection is not arbitrary, random or a generic consequence of the experience of gender violence. Lorde proposes a Black feminist 'uses of the erotic' that is primarily a force for connection. The erotic functions as a bridge enabling deep self-connection and connection with others. As she explains:

For the bridge which connects them is formed by the erotic - the sensual - those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passions of love, in its deepest meanings. (Lorde, 1978a:56)

Thus, it is possible to re-read Lorde's vision of the 'uses of the erotic' as part of a wider tradition of Black feminist discourses on connection and difference that both preceded and anticipated Crenshaw's (1989) seminal work on, and current debates about, intersectionality (see Chapter 4 of this thesis):

...forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference. (Lorde, 1978a:56)

Here, I want to make a link between Lorde's metaphor of 'bridge,' Hill Collins' experience of objectification, and the necessity for intersectional approaches to feminist thinking and interventions to confront sexual violence against women (Lockhart and Danis, 2010). Hill Collins (2000) identifies three sequential elements in her experience and process of gender violation, namely: 'to objectify' or disconnection from self; 'objectivity' or disconnection from mobility of position; and 'objectification' or disconnection from other women. Moreover,

these mechanisms of disconnection are contingent upon a configuration of other intersecting phenomena. The reason for identifying the interconnection between elements in the mechanisms used to abuse and legitimize power in gender violence is to emphasise that no intervention, policy or analysis can focus on, or pick out, one element in isolation of the others.

Conclusion

This analysis and application of ‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power’ explicates a number of tensions that are at the heart of this thesis. Re-reading Lorde enables the activism of Black feminist theory in the context of violence against women to expose some of the dangers and predicaments of using tools such as reclamation, re-appropriation and the ‘...*strategic* use of positivist essentialism...’ (Spivak, 2006:281; emphasis in original). This close re-reading of ‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power’ set out to:

...rethink the relation between knowledge and emotion and construct conceptual models that demonstrate the mutually constitutive rather than oppositional relation between reason and emotion. (Jaggar, 1989:190)

It would be reductionist to measure ‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power’ against the yardstick of whether it uses an ‘oppositional’ or a ‘mutually constitutive’ conceptual model, because Lorde employs both. Furthermore, the setting up and evaluation of such a measure could mask the complexity of her literary moves and political message. The point is not whether ‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power’ gets caught up in the aporia of positionality, but to use the

aporia as a site for productive thinking and application. In terms of ‘...a return to an interest in affect as that which gives rise to subjectivity, rather than following on from it’ (Frosh and Baraitser, 2009:159), it would seem that Lorde may take objection to this. Lorde may object to the notion of ‘a return’ and the either/or position of ‘gives rise to,’ ‘rather than following on from,’ because her treatise sustains an argument based on the idea of the erotic as mutually constitutive: the erotic as that which gives rise to subjectivity and subjectivity following on from the erotic.

Placing Lorde within this chapter alongside Black feminists such as Sara Ahmed, Gloria Anzaldúa, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Sianne Ngai, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Patricia Williams not only performs the transgression of temporal and spatial disciplinary borders, but, also, provides a particular methodology for teasing out the nuances of a detailed, close re-reading predicated primarily upon Black feminist scholarship.

I want to conclude with a quote from Spivak:

The feminist, reversing this hierarchy, must insist that sexuality and the emotions are, in fact, so much more important and threatening that a masculist sexual politics is obliged, repressively, to sustain all public activity. The most “material” sedimentation of this repressive politics is the institutionalized sex discrimination that seems the hardest stone to push...The opposition is thus not merely reversed; it is displaced. It is according to this practical structure of deconstruction as reversal-displacement, then, that I write...Displacing the opposition that it initially apparently questions, it is always different from itself, always defers itself.

It is neither a constitutive nor, of course, a regulative norm. If it were either, then feminist activity would articulate or strive toward that fulfilled displacement of public (male) and private (female): an *ideal* society and a *sex-transcendent* humanity. But deconstruction teaches one to question all transcendental idealisms. It is in terms of this peculiarity of deconstruction, then, that the displacement of male-female, public-private marks a shifting limit rather than the desire for a complete reversal. (Spivak, 1979:30-31; parentheses and emphasis in original)

Spivak is referring here to the regulatory, hierarchical division between the public and private, but in using this as an example, she demonstrates the relevance of her principles to all hierarchical divisions that exist between one position and another, even when these divisions are in the interests of political expediency. The key principle is that of bringing into ‘question all transcendental idealisms’ and this would include a questioning of the erotic as an example of ‘transcendental idealisms,’ but this does not preclude using the acts of questioning and the result of the acts of questioning as a foundation for feminist intervention.

Chapter 4

The Aporetics of Intersectionality

Introduction

CR: Here's a question that I want to ask you, partly because it's been a big problem to me and I'd like to know how you have handled it. Being black, a lesbian, and a feminist puts you in a position where you have to deal with what, at times, appear to be three mutually exclusive ideologies or priorities. How do you manage to integrate them all . . . or do you?

AL: Well, Cheryl, as I'm sure you know, it has felt, at different points in my life, like every single way in which I would identify myself was in total conflict with every other way. First of all, there's always going to be some group or some person who wants you to talk from only one particular perspective. That's very destructive. It's like putting all the eggs in one basket. It also reduces you to one component, and it's just such a terrible injustice to all the other pieces of yourself. It cuts me off from the energy that comes from all those different pieces. So integration is absolutely necessary. *I* have to work on integration for myself. *You* have to do it for yourself. What I've learned, and this was indeed a learning process, is that it is absolutely essential not to allow pieces of myself to be at war with each other. . . But as long as you let yourself be baffled, as long as you let one piece of yourself be cancelled out by another, you will always be subject to the kind of turmoil that sucks energy away. It's hard,

it's very hard. But it's not harder than the way they want us to live, which is in categories. And, it's far more productive. (Savren and Robinson, 1982:81-82; ellipsis in original)

Although Lorde did not use the term 'intersectionality,' it is clear from her life and works that she refused to:

...pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. (Lorde, 1980a:120)

The elements, essence and conceptual framework of the term 'intersectionality' have evolved through, and are evident in, Black feminist writing and testimony. It is within this historical, social and political context that Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality' in her 1989 seminal work entitled, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics'. In this paper Crenshaw uses intersectionality as a critical lens within the context of the U.S. legal framework in regards to discrimination and, as such, intersectionality offers a powerful tool for feminist legal theory, critical race theory and critical legal studies. Intersectionality has been taken up by a range of disciplines, including feminism and sociology, and provides an invaluable tool for critical analysis of simultaneous, multiple, structural discrimination. Indeed, recent evaluations of the conceptual framework of intersectionality indicate the reach, importance and relevance of intersectionality in current debates (Burman, 2004; Davis, 2008; Lutz et al., 2011; McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008; Pateman and Mills 2007; Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006; Taylor et al., 2010) and scholarship, including the introduction

in 2012 of *Intersectionalities: A Global Journal of Social Work Analysis, Research, Polity and Practice*.

Territorial disputes over who owns the term ‘intersectionality’ and where the term originated not only function as a distraction from the point of Crenshaw’s paper, but, also, function to establish and maintain the very notion of separate borders that Crenshaw contested. I believe that splits between analyses of the structural and analyses of the subject/subjective/subjectivity using intersectionality run counter to the spirit of intersectionality.

This chapter picks up on three specific components of Lorde’s reply to Robinson’s question quoted earlier. The objectives of this chapter (in no specific order because the components under examination are mutually constitutive) are: firstly, I want to understand the nature of the turmoil, or why ‘It’s hard, it’s very hard’ (Savren and Robinson, 1982:81) to:

...integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition. (Lorde, 1980a:120)

Secondly, I want to understand the nature and function of the ‘terrible injustice’ of living in categories (Savren and Robinson, 1982:81). Thirdly, I want to understand what is productive about integration.

Intersectionality: An Experience of Aporia

This reflective analysis examines the challenge I confront as a Black¹² lesbian feminist in trying to ‘integrate all the parts of who I am’ (Lorde, 1980a:120). This chapter picks up on Lorde’s reply to Robinson that ‘*I* have to work on integration for myself. *You* have to do it for yourself’ (Savren and Robinson, 1982:81) in an effort to understand better the personal, political task of doing intersectionality for myself and within myself. The challenge turns out to be more complicated and more emotionally difficult when integrating becomes the task of intersecting all the parts of ‘who I am’ and when those parts of who I am are constituted as the stranger within (Kristeva, 1991).

This chapter concentrates on two intersecting aspects of the challenge: firstly, I argue that any attempt to dismantle borders constructed to separate out categories of experience and identity bumps up against a number of interconnected aporia; secondly, I argue that the emotional task and experience of intersecting ‘all my different selves’ (Lorde, 1980a:121) across psychic borders has a ‘psychological toll’ (The Combahee River Collective, 1977:266). Lorde describes the difficulty in the following way:

It was hard enough to be Black, to be Black and female, to be Black, female, and gay. To be Black, female, gay, and out of the closet in a white

¹² In an interview with Pratibha Parmar and Jackie Kay that took place in London in 1988, Lorde explores the meaning of the term ‘Black’: ‘Take the issue of how we name ourselves, for example. In the United States, Black means of African heritage and we use the term Women of Color to include Native American, Latina, Asian American women. I understand that here, Black is a political term which includes all oppressed ethnic groups, and the term Women of Color is frowned upon’ (Parmar and Kay, 1988:176). However, I acknowledge that the use of the term ‘Black’ is problematic and contested. Brah (1996) provides a detailed analysis of the issue, stating that: ‘In practice, the category “black feminism” in Britain is only meaningful *vis-à-vis* the category “white feminism”’ (Brah, 1996:112).

environment, even to the extent of dancing in the Bagatelle, was considered by many Black lesbians to be simply suicidal. (Lorde, 1996:195)

The point is that it is the experience of aporia that produces the psychological turmoil. Any attempt at a ‘psychic retreat’ (Steiner, 1993:1) from the ‘psychological toll’ of aporia is merely to disavow the aporia. Royle defines aporia as:

...loosely a rhetorical term for “doubt” or “difficulty in choosing”, but more precisely it means a sort of absolute blockage, a “No Way”... (Royle, 2003:92)

This chapter seeks to use aporia as the site and method for the ‘*You* have to do it for yourself’ experience of intersectionality (Savren and Robinson, 1982:81; emphasis in original). Speaking of all experience, Derrida asks:

Can one speak - and if so, in what sense - of an *experience of the aporia*? An *experience of the aporia as such*? Or vice versa: Is an experience possible that would not be an experience of the aporia? (Derrida, 1993:15; emphasis in original)

As will become evident through this chapter, it is the experience of the ‘impossible’ in the aporia that creates the conditions for the ‘possible’ and the ‘productive.’ The graft of the ‘psychological toll’ (The Combahee River Collective, 1977:266) in negotiating the aporia opens up opportunities for an indeterminate becoming. Emphasis must be placed here on the word

‘indeterminate’ because intersectionality and the aporia are both constituted by, and contingent upon, the indeterminate.

I argue that it is engagement with the indeterminate that produces the transformation that is core to the activism of Black feminist theory. Furthermore, transforming the ‘terrible injustice’ (Savren and Robinson, 1982:81) of that which has been determined for Black women into a shifting indeterminate is the basis for an ethical, productive encounter.

The challenge of Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality is the challenge presented in the aphorism, ‘the personal is the political.’ Intersectionality goes beyond merely combining inadequate and oppressive socio-economic, political and legal structures, and inadequate feminist theories and practices. In regards to this point, Hill Collins offers a useful distinction between intersectionality and her own concept of the matrix of domination:

...I use and distinguish between both terms in examining how oppression affects Black women. Intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation. Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice. In contrast, the matrix of domination refers to how these intersecting oppressions are actually organized. (Hill Collins, 2000:18)

In this chapter I want to think of intersectionality in the light of Butler’s comment that:

Such a project requires thinking the theory of power together with a theory of the psyche...power that at first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject's self-identity. (Butler, 1997c:3)

This chapter proposes and interrogates the 'psychic form' of intersectionality that 'constitutes the subject's self-identity' in two ways that are interconnected. Firstly, the analysis dismantles the conceptual structure of intersectionality to show that it is bound up with the aporia of hospitality and borders in an effort to contain the anxiety generated by the foreign stranger within me. Secondly, the analysis examines how and why the intersection of selves that constitutes a self is so emotionally difficult. I want to understand how and why my emotional experience of the impact of intersectionality feels like Kristeva's description:

Confronting the foreigner whom I reject and with whom at the same time I identify, I lose my boundaries, I no longer have a container, the memory of experiences when I had been abandoned overwhelm me, I lose my composure. I feel "lost," "indistinct," "hazy." (Kristeva, 1991:187)

The Aporia of Intersectionality as Method and Content

This chapter brings together conceptual frameworks from Crenshaw, Derrida, and Lorde as theoretical lenses across temporal and spatial theoretical borders. Although they may appear to speak in different tongues, have different traditions, standpoints and could be seen as foreigners to each other, I suggest that Crenshaw, Derrida, and Lorde have a shared concern with intersectionality and

each provide ways to approach the challenges of intersectionality. In terms of methodology, this chapter is an intersection of approaches to intersectionality. It is a deliberate transgression of borders to attempt a space of emotional and ‘intellectual hospitality’ (Bennett, 2003 and Kaufman, 2001, cited in Molz and Gibson, 2007:2) because ‘...what is at stake is not only the thinking *of* hospitality, but thinking *as* hospitality’ (Friese, 2004, cited in Molz and Gibson, 2007:2; emphasis in original).

It will become evident that both the subject under analysis and the method used to examine the subject under analysis mirror each other. The subject under examination is the challenge of Crenshaw’s (1989) theory of intersectionality in relation to ‘...mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis’ (Crenshaw, 1989:139). To be more specific, the challenge under examination is not the identification or naming of the exclusive categories of identity, nor is it concerned with proving that particular categories exist; the challenge under examination is the exclusivity of the categories, or how and why the categories are bordered off from each other so that the separateness serves to maintain exclusivity. These borders between categories of experience and analysis are maintained even when the cost is erasure of ‘...conceptualization, identification and remediation of race and sex discrimination by limiting inquiry...’ (Crenshaw, 1989:140). The subject under analysis has the construction of borders and the maintenance of exclusive categories as core elements. Derrida’s work exposes that the complication is in the construction itself and this is demonstrated in the inherent aporia of borders, categories and exclusivity.

The theory of intersectionality effectively challenges mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis. The theory of intersectionality successfully

exposes that these are socially constructed borders of experience and analysis, and goes on to detail the destructive negative consequences of separated out categories. However, and this is the crux of this chapter, intersectionality does not resolve the aporia.

As a Black lesbian feminist my emotional struggle to tolerate¹³ the intersection of experience, and even desiring the fragmented parts of self to touch each other, come up against the aporia of borders and the aporia of hospitality. However, it is precisely within the indeterminate space of the aporia that the potential for an ethical, accountable relation to self can be experienced.

In other words, what is being proposed is the idea of the ‘possible’ within the ‘impossible.’ Within the context of this chapter, the ‘possible’ refers to Black women’s resistance to fixed, stable, totalized identity formations imposed by a racist, homophobic patriarchy. I contend that multiple and intersecting aporia create, rather than foreclose, the revolutionary potential of the activism of Black feminist theory. The task of confronting prior decided horizons of ‘representational realism’ (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1996:15) is the task of enduring the experience and experiment of the undecidable. Derrida states that:

I will even venture to say that ethics, politics, and responsibility, *if there are any*, will only ever have begun with the experience and experiment of the aporia (Derrida, 1992b:41; emphasis in original)

¹³ I use the word ‘tolerate’ with caution, aware of the aporia of tolerance and the relationship between tolerance, power and aversion, as superbly detailed by Brown (2008). Lorde speaks of tolerance as ‘the grossest reformism’ (Lorde, 1979b:111). For a more detailed exploration of the problematic of tolerance, please see Chapter 2, ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface.’

Inhabiting Intersectionality

In this thesis Lorde's work is primarily focussed on the tribulations of relating across difference and transgressing externally imposed ideological, structural, emotional and psychic borders used to separate, distort and fragment. Lorde explains the focus of her work in the following succinct summary:

My writing is about difference. My writing is about how do we learn to lie down with the different parts of ourselves, so that we can in fact learn to respect and honor the different parts of each other so that we in fact can learn how to use them, moving toward something that needs to be done, that has never been done before. (Abod, 1987:158)

Of significance to the analysis in this chapter is the way that Lorde prescribes the intersectional experience as a condition for moving toward the unknown and the unexpected. Derrida states that: 'If there were a horizon of expectation, if there were anticipation or programming, there would be neither event nor history' (Derrida and Stiegler, 2002:12).

My primary concern is to better understand why it is so difficult to 'learn to lie down with the different parts of ourselves' (Abod, 1987:158) in order to transgress internal apparently mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis. My concern is to find assistance in the sustained fight against seductive, comfortable resolutions to an already difficult life in a racist, homophobic patriarchy. Lorde outlines the dangers in the following caution:

And make no mistake; you will be paid well not to feel, not to scrutinize the function of your differences and their meaning, until it will be too late

to feel at all. You will be paid in insularity, in poisonous creature comforts, false securities, in the spurious belief that the midnight knock will always be upon somebody else's door. (Lorde, n.d.:204)

I want to better understand the emotional difficulty of embodied intersectionality. I find Alcoff's development of Merleau-Ponty's idea of the 'habitual body' in her article, 'Towards a Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment' (Alcoff, 1999), useful in thinking of intersecting vectors of identity categories inhabiting the body and constituted of bodily experience. The concept of the 'habitual body' picks up on the intersection of inhabitation and habit, where the idea of location and conditioning are inextricably linked.

The relevance of focussing on the embodied emotional experience of the aporia of intersectionality is revealed in the meaning of the word itself. The etymology of aporia is from the Greek 'aporos' which, when spilt into its two morphemes, *a* and *porous*, means 'without' and 'passage' so that 'aporos' comes to mean 'impassable' (Royle, 2003:92). From *poros* we get the word *pore* or *pores*, conjuring the idea of 'passage' from the inside to the outside of the body and vice-versa. Thus, in the context of the body *poros* comes to mean a passage that stimulates circulation, flow, and a type of bodily breathing which denotes a healthy living organism. However, I want to use Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality alongside Derrida's theory of aporia to contend that it is in the 'without passage' or it is in the 'impassable' indeterminacy of intersectionality that our '...fullest concentration of energy is available...' (Lorde, 1980a:120). However, the point is not to rank the indeterminacy of *aporos* above the determinacy of *poros*, or vice-versa, but to see these terms as mutually contingent.

Resorting to the configuration of a binary opposition of determinacy and indeterminacy is to miss the productive space of the dialectic.

Mairs (1989) explains that: ‘The body itself is a dwelling place, as the Anglo-Saxons knew in naming it *banhus* (bonehouse) and *lichama* (bodyhome)...’ (Mairs, 1989:471). For as long as I inhabit my body, the subject of this chapter inhabits me. It has become, and continues to be, my home; or in Lorde’s words, ‘...in my journey to this house of myself’ (Lorde, 1996:31). So I say to you and to myself, ‘Welcome, make yourself at home; my home is your home’ and, yet, as will become evident, this is impossible. The impossibility of this invitation of hospitality is concerned with the relationship between host and guest inextricably bound up with the aporia of borders.

This chapter argues that the impossibility of hospitality functions within the ‘bodyhome’ between the different intersecting elements of my subjectivity as a Black lesbian feminist. The attempts of my race, gender, class, sexuality and age to play host and guest to each other across multiple borders, within the territory of my psyche, are caught up in Derrida’s (1999:51) problematic, ‘Is not hospitality an interruption of the self?’

The Psychological Toll of Intersectionality

This is not a comfortable scrutiny. Even though it takes work to understand and communicate what is wrong with a single axis framework, it is perhaps harder to feel directly and fully that the ‘...intersectional experience is greater than the sum

of racism and sexism...’ (Crenshaw, 1989:140). The intersectional experience can be emotionally overwhelming. I am reminded of Lorde’s questions:

“How much of this truth can I bear to see/ and still live/ unblinded?/ How much of this pain/ can I use?” (Lorde, 1979d:106)

The following excerpts from Crenshaw’s (1989) paper highlight the function of borders within constructions of identity categories that the concept of intersectionality seeks to contest. The ‘tightly-drawn parameters’ (152), ‘normative vision’ (145), ‘filtered through categorical analyses that completely obscure’ (149-150), notions of discrimination ‘narrowly tailored to embrace only a small set of circumstances’ (151), ‘separate spheres ideology’ (154) and ‘limited view’ (145) that ‘erases Black women in the conceptualization, identification and remediation of race and sex discrimination’ (140) serve me very well in mitigating threatening collisions of exhaustion, vulnerability, pain, hatred and anger located firmly within my patrolled psychic borders. There are times when I ‘...hide behind the mockeries of separations that have been imposed upon us...’ (Lorde, 1977a:43) and ignore the ‘...fallacies of separatist solutions’ (Lorde, 1979a:61). The tension of the task is articulated by Lorde, on the one hand:

My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves... (Lorde, 1980a:120-121)

Whilst on the other hand:

And of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger. (Lorde, 1977a:42)

The challenge of the activism of Black feminist theory is in relation to external, racist, homophobic, patriarchal structures of oppression, but is also equally in relation to my internal, psychological self and our internal, psychological selves as Black women. Lorde points out that:

It is easier to deal with the external manifestations of racism and sexism than it is to deal with the results of those distortions internalized within our consciousness of ourselves and one another. (Lorde, 1983a:147)

Learning from the Combahee River Collective

The Combahee River Collective¹⁴ has given us one of the most articulate and comprehensive statements of the necessity for, and difficulty of being in, Black feminist activist spaces. The position and explanation of intersectionality in the very first paragraph of *A Black Feminist Statement* (The Combahee River Collective, 1977) emphasises the importance of the intersectional experience to the Collective's existence and mission:

...we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the

¹⁴ 'The Combahee River Collective first met in 1974. During "second-wave" feminism, many black feminists felt that the Women's Liberation Movement was defined by and paid exclusive attention to white, middle-class women. The Combahee River Collective was a group of black feminists who wanted to clarify their place in the politics of feminism. The name of the Collective comes from the Combahee River Raid of June 1863, which was led by Harriet Tubman and freed hundreds of slaves. The 1970s black feminists commemorated a significant historical event and a black feminist leader by selecting this name' (Napikoski, n.d.).

development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face. (The Combahee River Collective, 1977:261)

However, any notion, myth or fantasy that Black feminist spaces and experiences are comfortable, cosy, safe and secure is false. The Combahee River Collective makes this point clear: ‘The overwhelming feeling that we had is that after years and years we had finally found each other’ (1977:268). However, at the same time, the Combahee River Collective also acknowledges that:

The psychological toll of being a Black woman and the difficulties this presents in reaching political consciousness and doing political work can never be underestimated. (1977:266)

The Combahee River Collective identifies a number of reasons for the difficulty:

There is a very low value placed upon Black women’s psyches in this society, which is both racist and sexist (1977:266)

...it calls into question some of the most basic assumptions about our existence... (1977:267)

The material conditions of most Black women would hardly lead them to upset both economic and sexual arrangements that seem to represent some stability in their lives. (1977:267)

Many Black women have a good understanding of both sexism and racism, but because of the everyday constrictions of their lives cannot risk struggling against them both. (1977:267)

In addition to this list, Lorde adds that:

...we have *all* been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing...we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. (Lorde, 1980a:115; emphasis in original)

...the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships. (Lorde, 1980a:123)

Both Lorde and the Combahee River Collective make reference to Black women's experience of feeling 'crazy' within the distorted perspectives of a racist, homophobic patriarchy. For example, Lorde states:

...I wanted to say to the Black women of London, young Black women with whom I was in contact; it is not all in your head. Don't let them muck around with your realities. You may not be able to make very much inroad, but at least you've got to stop feeling quite so crazy. Because, after a while, constantly exposed to unacknowledged racism, Black women get to feeling really crazy. And then, it's all in our heads, the white women say. (Parmar and Kay, 1988:175)

The Combahee River Collective states that:

Black feminists often talk about their feelings of craziness before becoming conscious of the concepts of sexual politics, patriarchal rule, and, most importantly, feminism, the political analysis and practice that we women use to struggle against our oppression. (The Combahee River Collective, 1977:263).

After arguing that ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’ (Lorde, 1979a:60), after arguing that ‘...the entrapments used to neutralize Black and white women are not the same’ (Lorde, 1980a:118), after arguing that, ‘...beyond sisterhood is still racism’ (Lorde, 1979c:70), and after arguing for structures, ideology and spaces to attend to the intersection of simultaneous, multiple oppression, finally we actually obtain Black feminist spaces and services - a space longed for, rare and often unfamiliar; we are left with ourselves and each other in the space. Lorde reflects:

...I thought, wait a minute, racism doesn’t just distort white people - what about us? What about the effects of white racism upon the ways Black people view each other? Racism internalized? (Lorde, 1979d:96)

Black women are left with the ‘psychological toll’ (The Combahee River Collective, 1977:266) of difference, no patterns for relating across difference and, furthermore, we are left with the aporia of borders and hospitality.

These tensions do not just inhabit Black feminist spaces, services and scholarship. These tensions are inhabited and inhabit each other. Of course, this is no coincidence given that Black feminist spaces, services and scholarship are born out of subjugated knowledge in the matrix of oppression (Hill Collins, 2000). In other words, the activism of Black feminist theory arises out of, is understood in

terms of, and transforms, the daily lived experience of Black women. Lorde states that:

...survival isn't theoretical, we live it everyday. We live it on the streets, we live it in the banks, we live it with our children. (Greene, 1989:183)

Thus, and this is the point of this chapter, intersectionality is not just theoretical, but, rather, the process of surviving the intersectional experience needs to be understood in the context of Black women's lives. Lorde explains that:

...those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference - those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older - know that *survival is not an academic skill*. (Lorde, 1979b:112; emphasis in original).

Intersecting Encounters between Black Women

No matter how many times I read *Ain't I A Woman?* by hooks (1982), I am overwhelmed by feelings of rage, pain and despair. The emotional impact is traumatic, exhausting and more than I can bear. I am clear that this is not about first-encounter emotional impact, and I know there is no option of desensitisation due to familiarity, just as the emotional impact of working in Rape Crisis centres¹⁵

¹⁵ 'Rape Crisis (England and Wales) campaign continuously to raise awareness of the prevalence of sexual violence and, in particular, we highlight the importance and need for appropriate, high-quality and specialised support. Through our campaigns and briefings we raise awareness of sexual violence, challenge attitudes and press for change. We also work with other organisations, agencies and government departments to improve the response to those who are affected by and who perpetrate sexual violence. Rape Crisis Centres provide crucial crisis and long term specialised counselling, support and independent advocacy for all women and girls of all ages who have experienced any form of sexual violence both recently and/or in the past; centres are community based, and independent of government and the criminal justice system' (Rape Crisis [England and Wales], 2004-2013).

is the same today as it was when I first started thirty years ago. The emotional impact is an intersectional experience. Looking back on writing *Ain't I A Woman?*, bell hooks (1989:151-153) reflects:

The book emerged out of my longing for self-recovery, for education for critical consciousness - for a way of understanding black female experience that would liberate us from the colonizing mentality fostered in a racist, sexist context. (151)

While writing, I often felt an intense despair that was so overwhelming I really questioned how we could bear being alive in this society, how could we stay alive. I was profoundly discouraged by the many forces colluding to support the myth of the strong super-black woman, and it seemed that it would be impossible to compel recognition of black women's exploitation and oppression. It is not that black women have not been and are not strong; it is simply that this is only a part of our story, a dimension, just as the suffering is another dimension - one that has been most unnoticed and unattended to. (152-153)

The intersectional experience of living, writing and re-reading *Ain't I A Woman?* includes the suffering, exploitation and silencing of Black slave women in conjunction with the physical and emotional toil experienced by the Black feminist, bell hooks. This toil is inextricably entwined with my own encounter as a Black woman, and is a toil that is inextricably entwined with being a Black woman in relation to other Black women in the context of a racist, homophobic patriarchy.

What can be seen at play here is the refusal of intersectionality to be bounded. It is important to understand that although the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of race plus class plus gender plus other constructs of identity, intersectionality is not a unifying mechanism. The political function and lived experience of intersectionality is captured in Derrida's statement:

What interests me is the limit of every attempt to totalize, to gather, *versammeln*...the limit of this unifying, uniting movement, the limit that it had to encounter, because the relationship of the unity to itself implies some difference. (Derrida and Caputo, 1997:13; emphasis in original)

What interests me is the emotional difficulty of encountering and resisting the limit that includes my own emotional resistance to the element of unavailability in intersectionality.

The Excess of Black Women

Furthermore, in the context of a racist, homophobic patriarchy, Black women are constituted as the abject subject defined by Kristeva as:

...what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. (Kristeva, 1982:4)

Black women are excess in every sense of Bill Ashcroft's exploration of the word:

Too much, too long, too many, too subversive, too voluble, too insistent, too loud, too strident, too much-too-much, too complex, too hybrid, too convoluted, too disrespectful, too antagonistic, too insistent, too insistent,

too insistent, too repetitive, too paranoid, too . . . excessive. (Ashcroft, 1994:33; ellipsis in original)

Each identity category that constitutes the subjectivity of the Black woman, each identity category that constitutes me as a Black lesbian feminist, is excessive in itself. The infinite referral and deferral of intersections of excess produce excess, and are felt as an excess. The emotional impact of intersectionality is an excess that I find ‘too much-too-much’ to bear.

The Relation without Relation

The intersectional dynamics at work transgress temporal and spatial borders. I find Derrida’s statement that ‘What disrupts the totality is the condition for the relation to the other’ (Derrida and Caputo, 1997:13) useful when applied to Lorde’s example of attending her first job interview.

My first interview for a part-time job after school. An optical company on Nassau Street has called my school and asked for one of its students. The man behind the counter reads my application and then looks up at me, surprised by my Black face. His eyes remind me of the woman on the train when I was five. Then something else is added, as he looks me up and down, pausing at my breasts. (Lorde, 1983a:149)

The intersection of racism and sexism flows across time and space in a performative, embodied experience of infinite intersections. The body, breast and skin are sites of objectification that incorporate being treated as if she were a five-year-old roach intersected with hundreds of other inhabited habits of racism, sexism and homophobia experienced by Lorde across her life span, as indicated

by the use of the present tense. Lorde is caught in an indeterminate present-to-past, past-to-present relation. Referring to Lévinas' (1969) notion of 'rapport sans rapport,' Derrida explains that:

The structure of my relation to the other is of a "relation without relation."
It is a relation in which the other remains absolutely transcendent. I cannot reach the other. I cannot know the other from the inside and so on.
(Derrida and Caputo, 1997:14)

What I am trying to demonstrate is that hooks' writing of *Ain't I A Woman?*, contingent upon Truth's question, 'Ain't I A Woman?,' is inextricably bound with my personal engagement with *Ain't I A Woman?* and with Lorde's encounters as 'the sister outsider.' These intersecting relations are a 'relation without relation' (Derrida and Caputo, 1997:14), where the relation to the other is an impossible relation to self. Relation without relation is a borderless relation. The infinite intersections remain 'absolutely transcendent,' and although this condition is overwhelmingly destabilising, it is the very condition of transformation. To return to the quote by Lorde that I used to open this chapter, it is the condition in which:

My fullest concentration of energy is available to me...allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves... (Lorde, 1980a:120-121)

Lorde and Derrida each propose a political ethics that resists the limitations of presenting the self as a 'meaningful whole' (Lorde, 1980a:120). Derrida explains:

...it is because I am not one with myself that I can speak with the other and address the other. That is not a way of avoiding responsibility. On

the contrary, it is the only way for me to take responsibility and to make decisions (Derrida and Caputo, 1997:14)

Derrida's reference to responsibility alludes to a kind of ethics where the refusal of categories, or refusal of that which is already decided, is the basis for an ethics of decision-making. In the following quote Lorde brings in the notion of justice:

I am not one piece of myself. I cannot be simply a Black person and not be a woman too, nor can I be a woman without being a lesbian . . . Of course, there'll always be people, and there have always been people in my life, who will come to me and say, "Well, here, define yourself as such and such," to the exclusion of the other pieces of myself. There is an injustice to self in doing this... (Evans, 1979:72)

Intersectionality: The Unavailable Solution

I find particularly useful the phrase Minh-ha (2010) uses when she speaks of 'the boundary event,' conjuring up connotations of the active, productive dynamics of 'event' as something absolutely not static, emphasising 'boundary' as a verb, not a noun. The 'boundary event' of the activism of Black feminist theory becomes a question of who or what is host and guest in the intersecting borders of my experience and analysis. I propose that host and guest are at the heart of the matter; then, to go a step further, to propose that it is not hospitality, but the 'impossibility' of hospitality that is the issue. Reflecting on my experience as a Black lesbian feminist, it continues to be a training in understanding the 'possible' in the 'impossible.'

This task calls for a rigorous and vigilant resistance to expected solutions, frameworks of thinking and instructions, especially where credibility is contingent upon prior anticipated expectations. Derrida articulates the caution well:

The *arrivant* must be absolutely other, the other I expect not to be expecting, that I'm not waiting for, whose expectation is made of a nonexpectation, an expectation without what in philosophy is called a horizon of expectation, when a certain knowledge still anticipates and amortizes in advance. If I am sure that there is going to be an event, this will not be an event (Derrida and Stiegler, 2002:13; italics in original)

In speaking of the journey of the activism of Black feminist theory, Lorde picks up on the idea of the 'horizon of expectation' and, like Derrida, she resists the 'already':

What you chart is already where you've been. But where we are going, there is no chart yet...Our Black women's vision has no horizon. (Parmar and Kay, 1988:180)

Furthermore, Spivak speaks of:

...a placing forth of the solution as the unavailability of a unified solution to a unified or homogeneous, generating or receiving, consciousness. This unavailability is often not confronted. It is dodged and the problem apparently solved... (Spivak, 1985:55)

In accordance with Spivak, this chapter attempts to trace the solution of 'unavailability' in intersectionality not in order to discredit intersectionality as a solution, but, rather, to disrupt intersectionality as a 'unified' solution. If we are

not careful, the seduction of intersectionality as a solution to confront unified, homogeneous constructions becomes a prior, unified solution in itself. Intersectionality becomes victim to the very phenomenon it seeks to undo.

This chapter argues that in the primary task of dismantling borders between race, class, gender, age, sexuality and (dis)ability, intersectionality performs the solution as the unavailability of a unified solution. Derrida summarises the predicament:

You see, pure unity or pure multiplicity - when there is only totality or unity and when there is only multiplicity or disassociation - is a synonym of death. (Derrida and Caputo, 1997:13)

Intersectionality: A Theory about Borders

I want to think of my subjectivity, identity and encounters as a Black lesbian feminist in terms of a psychic territory, picking up on Radhakrishnan's comment that:

Locations are as factual as they are imaginary and imagined, as physical as they are psychic, and as open to direct experience as they are to empathic participation. (Radhakrishnan, 2000:56)

The notion of a psychic location where multilayered experiences and emotional responses to those experiences intersect brings to life the idea that:

The politics of location is productive...because it makes one location vulnerable to the claims of another and enables multiple contested

readings of the one reality from a variety of locations and positions.
(Radhakrishnan, 2000:56-57)

The various locations within my psychic territory actively resist the vulnerability of multiple intersecting claims. My theoretical empathic participation in the articulation and politics of intersectionality is not always welcomed into the location of my emotional experience, particularly when it concerns multi-layered realities of oppression.

I re-read Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality as a theory about borders. When Crenshaw speaks of *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Class...*, the 'demarginalising' involves the actual sociological margins, and the position and experience of being on the margins.

Crenshaw explains that '[t]hese problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including Black women within an already established analytical structure' (Crenshaw, 1989:140). In other words, saying, 'Come on over the border, we include you,' is not enough as this does not move the border one jot; to do this is simply to be re-positioned across an existing border. Border plus border plus border plus border equates to borders in the plural. In stark contrast, the intersection of borders is greater because it accounts for the structural and emotional collision of the traffic of discrimination flowing in multiple directions:

The point is that Black women can experience discrimination in any number of ways and that the contradiction arises from our assumptions that their claims of exclusion must be unidirectional. Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one

direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (Crenshaw, 1989:149)

In other words, what is required is an understanding of the injuries caused by the collision and why the force of the impact of the collision is so powerful.

This is not just an intellectual exercise; the injuries caused by the collision have an emotional impact. The problem is that acknowledgement of the injuries are both desired and resisted at the same time. Indeed, Crenshaw is clear that not to understand the collision at the intersection, and not to understand the ways in which the vectors of oppressive constructs play host and guest to each other across constructed borders, serve to produce, mask, censor and regulate the injurious impact with the following consequences:

...Black women are caught between ideological and political currents that combine first to create and then to bury Black women's experiences. (Crenshaw, 1989:160)

Awareness that I get caught up in, and collude with, the burying of my own experiences in order to avoid the emotional impact of multiple injuries is particularly excruciating.

The actual construction of borders further complicates the situation. Thiongo states that:

...if a border marks the outer edge of one region, it also marks the beginning of the next region. As the marker of an end, it also functions as the marker of a beginning. Without the end of one region, there can be no beginning of another. Depending on our starting point, the border is both the beginning and the outer edge. Each space is beyond the boundary of the other. The border in between serves as both the inner and the outer of the other. It is thus at once the boundary and a shared space. (Thiongo, 1996:120)

The predicament of borders is, thus: without the border, how can things be defined? But, at the same time, borders are indeterminable. Application of Thiongo's explanation to categories of experience becomes a question of trying to pinpoint the outer edge of, or marker of a beginning and an end between, race, gender, class, sexuality, age and (dis)ability. It would seem that, depending on our starting point, all categories of identity and experience are the beginning, end and outer edge; each category and experience is beyond the boundary of the other. Borders as a structure undo themselves. Borders produce a false binary. The structure of a border is an aporia, where aporia is the tension made up of, and arising out of, the 'impossible' or that which deconstructs itself in practice.

In other words, the predicament is more than a paradox. In a paradox, the relationship and structure between the things in the paradox do not necessarily undo each other. However, borders simultaneously position and reposition; thus, position is undone. Derrida comments: 'That is what gives deconstruction its movement, that is, constantly to suspect, to criticize the given determinations...?' (Derrida and Caputo, 1997:18). It is within the 'movement' of 'given determinations' that the 'possible' within the 'impossible' and the 'available'

within the 'unavailable' can be found. The 'movement' of 'given determinations' of race, gender, class, age, sexuality and (dis)ability is a dynamic that is at the core of intersectionality, and a dynamic that is infinitely difficult to embody and feel.

The intersection or dissolution of borders between the constituent parts of myself and experience is not just a difficult emotional task because I have the habit of thinking in bordered, categorical, hierarchical binaries; it is not just difficult because I have no patterns for relating across difference; it is difficult because the construction of borders is contingent upon the 'impossible.' I rely on psychic borders for a delusion of emotional stability. This delusion is because the very structure of the concept of borders is inherently unstable. This instability becomes compounded by, is contingent upon, and shares, a similar inherent instability with the concept and conditions of hospitality.

Spivak states that '[t]he putative center welcomes selective inhabitants of the margin in order better to exclude the margin' (Spivak, 1979:35). The question is: what do I allow in and what 'selective' criteria do I use 'in order to better exclude' to the margins of my consciousness? The criteria for 'selective inhabitants' to be allowed to cross, or not to cross, constructed borders, have a direct bearing on intention and vice-versa. Intention and construction are mutually constituted and contingent. It would seem that both the intention and the construction of psychic borders, designed to exclude the unwanted to the margins, operate in the same ways, and for similar reasons, as socially constructed borders. The psychic and social intention is to disavow the anxiety of the 'unavailability of the solution.'

Intersectionality: The Impossibility of Hospitality

The tension is that whilst I cannot ‘...afford to settle for one easy definition, one narrow individuation of self’ (Lorde, 1996:197) and ‘...realize that our place was the very house of difference rather [than] the security of any one particular difference’ (Lorde, 1996:197), this does not resolve the problem of absolute hospitality between the different selves in the ‘bonehouse’ (Mairs, 1989:471) of difference. Derrida explains the problem:

The law of hospitality, the express law that governs the general concept of hospitality, appears as a paradoxical law, pervertible or perverting...absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names. (Derrida, 2000:25; emphasis in original)

Application of this explanation to intersectionality might read something like:

Absolute hospitality requires that I open up my bonehouse of difference and welcome not only those identifiable categories and experiences of difference with name and status (such as age, race, class, gender, sexuality and (dis)ability), but to those absolute, unknown, anonymous other collisions, injuries, permutations and experiences of difference. Absolute hospitality requires that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let

them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them without any conditions. It requires that I offer unconditional movement between:

...all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition. (Lorde, 1980a:120-121)

Derrida's definition of 'absolute hospitality' is much more than a friendly welcome across the border.

The problem is that the moment I say, 'my place is your place,' the demarcation between the host in 'place' and the guest in 'place' is immediately undone. 'My home is your home' is a giving up of my home and, in doing so, a giving up of my position of host in my home. 'I *give place* to them' (Derrida, 2000:25; emphasis in original) is to give up any sense of emotional security in the place of my 'bonehouse' based on stable categories of identity.

Actually, the implications of Derrida's imperative go much further, as summarised by Westmoreland (2008:6): 'This very welcoming opens up into a violence. Such violence turns the home inside out.' Hillis Miller explains it in the following way:

A host is a guest, and a guest is a host. A host is a host. The relation of household master offering hospitality to a guest and the guest receiving it, of host and parasite in the original sense of "fellow guest," is inclosed within the word "host" itself. (Hillis Miller, 1979:180)

Derrida explains the dialectic as:

...the *hôte* who receives (the host), the one who welcomes the invited or received *hôte* (the guest), the welcoming *hôte* who considers himself the owner of the place, is in truth a *hôte* received in his own home. He receives the hospitality that he offers *in* his own home; he receives it *from* his own home - which, in the end, does not belong to him. The *hôte* as host is a guest. (Derrida, 1999:41; italics and emphasis in original)

This precarious situation is familiar and recognised in relation to national, social, ideological and political borders.

However, I propose that this is precisely the situation in relation to borders of experience, identity and feeling in the psyche. The situation is an interruption of the self. The precarity is that ‘absolute hospitality’ deconstructs the border between host and guest. As Westmoreland (2008:4) explains, ‘[t]he conditions for such hospitality are both the conditions for its possibility and its impossibility.’ Returning to Thiongo’s (1996) observation, it would appear that the conditions of hospitality are ‘...at once the boundary and a shared space’ (Thiongo, 1996:120), where the unconditioned needs the conditioned because the conditioned is constitutive of the unconditioned.

Hospitality is a tricky term; Derrida indicates this in the use of ‘pervertible or perverting.’ The trickiness is in the word itself:

...the word “hospitality” carries its opposite within itself...The word “hospitality” derives from the Latin *hospes*, which is formed from *hostis*, which originally meant a “stranger” and came to take on the meaning of the enemy or “hostile” stranger (*hostilis*), + *pets* (*potis*, *potes*, *potentia*), to have power. “Hospitality,” the welcome extended to the guest, is a

function of the power of the host to remain master of the premises.
(Derrida and Caputo, 1997:110; italics in original)

Thus, we have numerous intersecting predicaments producing a difficult basis for an unconditional welcome:

1. Potentially, we have a hostile stranger who turns out to be the enemy, a parasite with the power to take over the 'bonehouse';
2. We have the host, defined by her position, to welcome the guest in to her 'bonehouse' and remain proprietor; yet, the moment she says, 'my "bonehouse" is your "bonehouse,"' her 'bonehouse' is no longer her own;
3. We have Derrida's 'absolute hospitality,' where host and guest '...both imply and exclude each other, simultaneously...exclusion and inclusion are inseparable in the same moment...' (Derrida, 2000:81), and as such, 'absolute hospitality' performs 'the law without law' (Derrida, 2000:83).

The 'Pervertible or Perverting' Law of the Hatch

I want to offer a re-reading of the hatch example used by Crenshaw (1989) in the light of Derrida's aporia of 'absolute hospitality' in order to demonstrate the 'paradoxical,' 'pervertible or perverting' law of hospitality at work. In the example of the hatch, Crenshaw asks us to:

Imagine a basement which contains all people who are disadvantaged on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual preference, age and/or physical ability. These people are stacked - feet standing on shoulders - with those on the

bottom being disadvantaged by the full array of factors, up to the very top, where the heads of all those disadvantaged by a singular factor brush up against the ceiling. Their ceiling is actually the floor above which only those who are *not* disadvantaged in any way reside. In efforts to correct some aspects of domination, those above the ceiling admit from the basement only those who can say that “but for” the ceiling, they too would be in the upper room. A hatch is developed through which those placed immediately below can crawl. Yet this hatch is generally available only to those who - due to the singularity of their burden and their otherwise privileged position relative to those below - are in the position to crawl through. Those who are multiply-burdened are generally left below unless they can somehow pull themselves into the groups that are permitted to squeeze through the hatch. (Crenshaw, 1989:151-152; emphasis in original)

It is clear that the hatch is not opened up to the ‘absolute, unknown, anonymous other.’ Hospitality is conditional, producing the criteria for a ‘pact’ (Derrida, 2000:25). The ‘family name’ (Derrida, 2000:25) criteria become the ‘but for’ (Crenshaw, 1989:151), and Derrida’s (2000:25) ‘social status’ criteria could be translated as ‘those placed immediately below’ and ‘the singularity of their burden.’ Position becomes criteria and criteria dictate position in a gradient of spatial and ideological proximity contingent upon sameness. Following this logic, those who, due to their ‘otherwise privileged position relative to those below’ and ‘placed immediately below’ the hatch, are offered hospitality. The ‘absolute, unknown, anonymous other’ are:

...told to wait in the unprotected margins until they can be absorbed into the broader, protected categories of race and sex. (Crenshaw, 1989:152)

Crenshaw's analogy of the hatch provides an apposite framework to interrogate how hierarchies of oppression function to maintain the positions of host and guest within the collective 'bonehouse' of feminism, and within the individual 'bonehouses' of ourselves as feminists. Lorde asks:

What woman is so enamoured of her own oppression that she cannot see her heelprint upon another woman's face? What women's terms of oppression have become precious and necessary to her as a ticket into the fold of the righteous, away from the cold winds of self-scrutiny? (Lorde, 1981:132)

Stamping on the face of an aspect of self or on an aspect of another woman's self is the 'terrible injustice' Lorde spoke about in her reply to Robinson, quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Enamoured identification with 'mutually exclusive ideologies or priorities' that lets 'one piece of yourself be cancelled out by another' (Savren and Robinson, 1982:81-82) produces false hierarchies of oppression.

Hostile Strangers: Black Women Go Around to the Back Door

I contend that it is possible to trace the 'paradoxical,' 'pervertible or perverting' law of hospitality at work in all of the examples that Crenshaw (1989) uses, such as: Black women and rape (157) ; Black women and domestic violence; Black women and their Black communities (155); Black women and white communities

(156); Black women and the Black political agenda, including ‘the Black liberation movement’ (156) ‘Black liberationist agendas’ (150). In every example that Crenshaw examines, Black women are either completely excluded or ‘...have to go around to the back door...’ (Crenshaw, 1989:161). In these multiple examples of inhospitality, Black women are recognised as the ‘absolute, unknown, anonymous other,’ and as such, represent both the “hostile” and the stranger’ (Derrida and Caputo, 1997:110). In other words, the ‘absolute unknown, anonymous other’ of Black women becomes translated into a known category, albeit hostile. Black women come to represent the situation whereby ‘the foreigner lives within us...the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode...’ (Kristeva, 1991:1). Lorde address this point in the following way:

It’s easier to deal with a poet, certainly a black woman poet, when you categorize her down, narrow her down so that she can fulfil your expectations, so she’s socially acceptable and not too disturbing, nor too discordant. (Tate, 1983:88)

Ahmed summarizes the ‘pervertible’ machinations of the stranger situation as:

...we recognise somebody *as a stranger*, rather than simply failing to recognise them . . . Strangers are not simply those who are not known in this dwelling, but those who are, in their very proximity, *already recognised as not belonging*, as being out of place. Such a recognition of those who are out of place allows both the demarcation and enforcement of the boundaries of “this place”, as where “we” dwell. (Ahmed, 2000:21-22; emphasis in original)

I would say that racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, classism and (dis)ability discrimination are no stranger to me. Indeed, I make it my business to know and recognise these forms of oppression. Intersectionality continues to focus my recognition so that I see the proximity between different forms of oppression with increasing clarity and realise that they are rather intimate. However, in ‘this place’ of my ‘bonehouse,’ I find that which is no stranger to me becomes a stranger and I become a stranger to myself.

The Inward Disturbance of Intersectionality

The ‘pervertible or perverting’ characteristic of hospitality and the ‘pervertible or perverting’ characteristic of borders are constituted and function in similar ways. Hospitality and borders share a quality of internal instability; they supplement each other and function as supplements in their own right. Furthermore, it is becoming apparent that the ‘pervertible or perverting’ ‘...operates normatively; and how its normativity is rendered oblique almost to the point of invisibility’ (Brown, 2008:4).

The relevance to my argument of tracking how ‘pervertible or perverting’ operates, and the disavowal of its anxiety provoking machinations, is that this is at work in my bonehouse of difference. It is the crux of the emotional difficulty I encounter in attempting to allow the collision of intersecting experiences and analyses of my different selves. Caputo explains:

Derrida likes to say that we do not know what hospitality is, not because the idea is built around a difficult conceptual riddle, but because, in the

end, hospitality is not a matter of objective knowledge, but belongs to another order all together, beyond knowledge, an enigmatic “experience” in which I set out for the stranger, for the other, for the unknown, where I cannot go. (Derrida and Caputo, 1997:112)

Without careful scrutiny the limits of hospitality could limit the availability of my fullest concentration of energy for the activism of Black feminist theory, and limit ‘the transformation of silence into language and action’ (Lorde, 1977a:40). However, as Caputo explains:

Derrida’s interest in exploring the tensions within “hospitality” is not aimed at cynically unmasking it as just more mastery and power...hospitality is inhabited from within, inwardly disturbed by these tensions, but he does this precisely in order to open hospitality up, to keep it on guard against itself, on the *qui vive*, to open - to push - it *beyond* itself. For it is only that internal tension and instability that keeps the idea of hospitality alive, open, loose. (Derrida and Caputo, 1997:112; emphasis in original)

The emotional task of inhabiting intersectionality from within is residing with the inward disturbance.

Intersectionality and the Foreigner

Derrida opens *Of Hospitality* with the ‘Foreigner Question,’ formulated in the following way: ‘As though the foreigner were being-in-question, the very question of being-in-question, the question-being or being-in-question of the question’ (Derrida, 2000:3). A close re-reading of Crenshaw’s (1989) paper through Derrida’s ‘Foreigner Question’ reads the intersectional experience of Black women’s multiple oppression as the very question of being-in-question.’ ‘[T]he very question of being-in-question’ is at the heart of the ‘psychological toll’ (The Combahee River Collective, 1977:266) of dealing with the foreigner within me.

Both the intersectional experience and the foreigner are responded to in similar ways for similar reasons. The denial, exclusion and rejection of the intersectional experience are contingent upon logics that are used to deny, exclude and reject the foreigner. Both the foreigner and the intersectional experience of Black women seek recognition for admission through ideological, analytical, physical and emotional border control.

Both the foreigner and the intersectional experience of Black women find themselves subject to the laws, questions and anxieties that determine border control. Westmoreland outlines the position and function of the foreigner:

An individual was recognized by how he appeared before the law, what status he held in the *polis*. The foreigner was placed inside the law, under the law, essential to the law. The foreigner occupied an integral space within the city. Indeed, the foreigner was essential because he provided that to which citizens could compare themselves. From a

phenomenological standpoint, one could claim that one's identity is only understood in relation to others. Citizens understand themselves in relation to others, to foreigners. "We are not those sorts of people. We are citizens." In the laws of hospitality, we find a multiplicity involving differentiation according to the right of the state. The state establishes rules through which people can be divided into citizens and non-citizens, citizens and foreigners, hosts and guests. It can identify individuals; and therefore, it can include or exclude whosoever it chooses based on the laws, which it has created. (Westmoreland, 2008:2; italics in original)

Crenshaw (1989) demonstrates that the criteria, rules and laws invoked to exclude Black women's intersectional experience are contingent upon what is understood in relation to others. The key point is that these 'others' are known others; others that can be recognised and identified with. The foreigner is constituted and situated by laws that demarcate what is to be included and excluded, '...predicated on a discrete set of experiences...' (Crenshaw, 1989:140). Crenshaw shows that in the case of Black women's intersectional experience, the discrete is '...defined respectively by white women's and Black men's experiences' (Crenshaw, 1989:143) thus '...limiting inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group' (Crenshaw, 1989:140).

Pandora's Box

When Black Women ‘...placed inside the law, under the law, essential to the law’ (Westmoreland, 2008:2) presented their case of intersectional discrimination, the conclusion of the court was:

Title VII does not indicate that the goal of the statute was to create a new classification of “black women”...The prospect of the creation of new classes of protected minorities, governed only by the mathematical principles of permutation and combination, clearly raises the prospect of opening the hackneyed Pandora’s box. (Crenshaw, 1989:142)

This fascinating summary incorporated the key elements used in immigration control designed to include and exclude selective inhabitants. Those elements include the notion of the creation of a ‘new classification’ defined in relation to a prior known, the use of mathematical principles and the anxiety of Pandora’s box.

Westmoreland’s (2008) depiction of the citizen’s evaluation of self in terms of the foreigner that “[w]e are not those sorts of people” is exactly the response of the courts and is exactly where the courts missed the point. The point is that Black women were saying exactly that ‘we are not those sorts of people’; they were saying, ‘we are not white women and we are not Black men.’ Actually, Black women were contesting the ‘...mathematical principles of permutation and combination...’ (Crenshaw, 1989:142) used by the court to classify and recognise injustice. It is, as Derrida explains: ‘Justice, if it has to do with the other...is always incalculable. You cannot calculate justice’ (Derrida and Caputo, 1997:17).

Pandora's box becomes translated into what Honig observes as the familiar response to the foreigner:

Again and again, I find foreignness used in familiar ways, as a device that gives shape to or threatens existing political communities by marking negatively what "we" are not. (Honig, 2001:2-3)

The device becomes a mechanism to produce a number of interconnected phenomena simultaneously. The device of the foreigner produces the threat, legitimizes a prior established set of knowns to identify the threat, and produces the "'we' are not' border criteria for what is recognised/included and unrecognised/excluded.

It is a set of intersecting productions I recognise performed in my psyche in response to 'the very question of being-in-question.' Black women since Sojourner¹⁶ Truth, in 'question of being-in-question, the question-being or being-in-question of the question' (Derrida, 2000:3), continue to ask, 'Ain't I A Woman?' (Truth, 1851). Crenshaw explains:

Unable to grasp the importance of Black women's intersectional experiences, not only courts, but feminist and civil rights thinkers as well have treated Black women in ways that deny both the unique compoundedness of their situation and the centrality of their experiences to the larger classes of women and Blacks. Black women are regarded either as too much like women or Blacks and the compounded nature of their experience is absorbed into the collective experiences of either group

¹⁶ Interestingly, 'Sojourner' is another word for 'traveller,' which conjures connotations of the mobile foreigner.

or as too different, in which case Black women's Blackness or femaleness sometimes has placed their needs and perspectives at the margin of the feminist and Black liberationist agendas. (Crenshaw, 1989:150)

Black Women: The 'Absolute, Unknown, Anonymous Other'

The technique of dealing with difference through the polarities of absorption or rejection is articulated by Lorde as '...pretending those differences are insurmountable barriers, or that they do not exist at all' (Lorde, 1980a:115). Lorde dismantles the hypocrisy of the 'too different' (Crenshaw, 1989:150) logic in the following way:

As white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and *define* woman in terms of their own experience alone, then women of Color become "other", the outsider whose experience and tradition is too "alien" to comprehend. (Lorde, 1980a:117, emphasis in original)

The effect of using the experience, subjectivity and identity of the 'already known' as a measure is to absent anything that is absent from the match. Lorde traces these absences and she observes that:

The literature of women of Color is seldom included in women's literature courses and almost never in other literature courses, nor in women's studies as a whole. All too often, the excuse given is that the literatures of women of Color can only be taught by Colored women, or that they are too difficult to understand, or that classes cannot "get into" them because they come out of experiences that are "too different." (Lorde, 1980a:117)

Lorde goes on to expose the contradictions, instability and arbitrary nature of the criteria of “too different” (Lorde, 1980a:117; Crenshaw, 1989:150), pointing out that those who see Black women’s work as “too different”:

...seem to have no trouble at all teaching and reviewing work that comes out of the vastly different experiences of Shakespeare, Molière, Dostoyefsky, and Aristophanes. (Lorde, 1980a:117)

Although contemporary literature courses may now include ‘...the literatures of women of Color...,’ so that the manifestation, function and production of “too different” may have altered since 1980, I would contend that the principle of Lorde’s argument remains relevant.

The ‘Foreigner Question’ of the ‘question of being-in-question’ (Derrida, 2000:3) is performed in the interview between Lorde and Rich (Lorde, 1979d). They discuss the matter of documentation, in which Rich proposes documentation as a mechanism to aid a form of understanding based on a shared identification that clearly was absent. Documentation becomes, for Rich, a passport to understanding the foreign other, whereas for Lorde, documentation represents a passport to misunderstanding:

Adrienne: So if I ask for documentation, it’s because I take seriously the spaces between us that difference has created, that racism has created. There are times when I simply cannot assume that I know what you know, unless you show me what you mean.

Audre: But I'm used to associating a request for documentation as a questioning of my perceptions, an attempt to devalue what I'm in the process of discovering.

Adrienne: It's not. Help me to perceive what you perceive. That's what I'm trying to say to you.

Audre: But documentation does not help one perceive. At best it only analyzes the perception. At worst, it provides a screen by which to avoid concentrating on the core revelation... (Lorde, 1979d:104; italics in original)

Documentation functions as a foreigner device to make known that which is unknown, measured in terms of what is known. Derrida comments:

...if I decide because *I know*, within the limits of what *I know* and *know I must do*, then I am simply deploying a foreseeable program and there is no decision, no responsibility, no event. (Borradori, 2003:118; emphasis in original)

In an attempt to move beyond the criteria of what is known, Rich uses the following reasoning: 'There are times when I simply cannot assume that I know what you know, unless you show me what you mean' (Lorde, 1979d:104). However, all that is established is that Rich cannot assume she knows, and her request for documentation as a mechanism to 'show me' immediately unravels any position of not knowing; or, rather, it presumes a stability of a knowing self that is in need of mere confirmation rather than transformation.

There are several intersecting issues occurring here; a key point is that the request comes from Rich and, thus, it is Rich who establishes the criteria. Furthermore, documentation is not neutral. The historical, political and social symbolic significance of documentation is racialised, and has been used to police all kinds of boundaries between people, communities and nations. I am reminded of Lorde's journal entry from her two week trip to Russia in 1976 where she writes: 'I thought of the South African women in 1956 who demonstrated and died rather than carry passbooks' (Lorde, 1976:29). Even though I was born and raised in Britain, I carry my British passport with me at all times, vigilant of the 'question of being-in-question, the question-being or being-in-question of the question' (Derrida, 2000:3). Detailed deconstruction of the exchange reveals the impossibility of 'the absolute, unknown, anonymous other' (Derrida, 2000:25). Keating argues that:

No question to the stranger is pure because we already assimilate their being into terms that we can arrange into our own conceptions of being (Keating, 2004:no page)

Conclusion

I conclude by using the theory of intersectionality to frame a possible re-reading of Lorde's description of the 'pellet of yellow colouring' penetrating packets of margarine. Lorde remembers:

During World War II, we bought sealed plastic packets of white, uncolored margarine, with a tiny, intense pellet of yellow coloring perched

like a topaz just inside the clear skin of the bag. We would leave the margarine out for a while to soften, and then we would pinch the little pellet to break it inside the bag, releasing the rich yellowness into the soft pale mass of margarine. Then taking it carefully between our fingers, we would knead it gently back and forth, over and over, until the color had spread throughout the whole pound bag of margarine, thoroughly coloring it. I find the erotic such a kernel within myself. When released from its intense and constrained pellet, it flows through and colors my life with a kind of energy that heightens and sensitizes and strengthens all my experience. (Lorde, 1978a:57)

The sealed plastic packets of uncoloured margarine could represent the determined categories of identity that are bordered off by a range of mechanisms functioning to reduce Black women to one component.

The 'intense pellet of yellow colouring perched like a topaz' could represent the potential of the theory of intersectionality. The action of kneading 'it gently back and forth, over and over, until the color had spread throughout the whole pound bag of margarine, thoroughly colouring it' could be the toil of allowing different aspects of self to play host and guest to each other, so that host is guest and guest is host, breaching predetermined borders between categories of experience and identity. It is interesting to note that Anzaldúa (2007) also uses the metaphor of 'kneading' to embody the connection between aspects of identity. Anzaldúa states that:

I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that

questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings.
(Anzaldúa, 2007:103)

The ‘energy that heightens and sensitizes and strengthens all my experience’ (Lorde, 1978a:57) could represent the productive potential, the possibility of transformation available in the impossibility of hospitality that constitutes the task of intersecting all of the different parts of myself.

This reflective analysis set out to examine the emotional turmoil of intersectionality. I argue that ‘It’s hard, it’s very hard’ (Savren and Robinson, 1982:81) because the undecidable aporetic space of intersectionality is a direct challenge to the propaganda of predetermined, ‘tightly-drawn parameters’ (Crenshaw, 1989:152) that constitute identity positions in this racist, homophobic patriarchal world. This propaganda operates according to an equation where certainty is synonymous with rationality and order. Intersectionality is ‘very hard’ because it requires trust in ‘...our deepest and nonrational knowledge’ (Lorde, 1978a:53).

I contend that the ‘terrible injustice’ (Savren and Robinson, 1982:82) of being reduced to one component works in numerous ways. Firstly, the legitimacy of privileging one component of identity that functions to allow ‘...one piece of yourself [to] be cancelled out by another’ (Savren and Robinson, 1982:82) is contingent upon the criteria of an ‘always already.’¹⁷

¹⁷ The term ‘always already’ (Althusser, 1971) has been taken up by Black feminist scholars to communicate the predetermined categories of identity and positionality (Boyce Davies, 1994:55; Chabram-Dernersesian, 2006:185; Conboy et al., 1997:3; duCille, 1994:233; Durham, 2007:10; Fulton, 2006:11; Hammonds, 1995:383; Hayes, 2010:45; Shildrick and Price, 1998:62; West, 1988:32; Whelehan, 1995:110).

Secondly, the predetermined criteria of identity categories are a mechanism of regulation and control that limit the choices, resource and experience of self-definition available to Black women. A predetermined decision is no decision at all. In stark contrast, the aporia of intersectionality enables a more just, responsible and ethical encounter with self and others. de Unamuno explains that:

What I wish to establish is that uncertainty, doubt, perpetual wrestling with the mystery of our final destiny, mental despair, and the lack of any solid and stable dogmatic foundation, may be the basis of an ethic (de Unamuno, 2006:230)

Thirdly, the potential of the aporia of intersectionality moves beyond the self and forms the foundation for an ethical engagement with others. Butler explains how this works:

If the subject is opaque to itself, not fully translucent and knowable to itself, it is not thereby licensed to do what it wants or to ignore its obligations to others...Indeed, if it is precisely by virtue of one's relations to others that one is opaque to oneself, and if those relations to others are the venue for one's ethical responsibility, then it may well follow that it is precisely by virtue of the subject's opacity to itself that it incurs and sustains some of its most important ethical bonds. (Butler, 2005:19-20)

The productive potential of the aporia of intersectionality is summarised succinctly by the Combahee River Collective: 'We believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity...?' (The Combahee River Collective, 1977:264).

Lorde cautions that '[w]e cannot settle for the pretenses of connections...'
(Lorde, 1983a:153). The implications of this are infinite; an infinite referral and deferral of pretences of connections that form a complex web of interconnected pretences. Through the critical lens of aporia and intersectionality, I now understand that the 'pretenses' function to mask, censor and disavow the anxiety that connections within myself, with other Black women and across political alliances produces. The situation of remaining proprietor of my 'bonehouse' of difference is contingent upon the 'pretenses.'

The success of political coalitions, collaborative working, alliances and bridge-building for liberation is dependent upon, and in direct correlation to, our, my and your capacity to be in the 'borderland' of self. Anzaldúa explains:

A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (Anzaldúa, 2007:25)

Being in the 'borderland' of self involves giving up inherited inhabitation of the habit of borders. Survival of the 'borderland' of self is not in that which is available, possible and known. So, to the question I am often asked and ask often of myself, 'If "*the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*" (Lorde, 1979b:112; emphasis in original), and these are the only tools that I habit and inhabit, what and where are the alternative tools? My answer would now be 'the "absolute, unknown, anonymous other"' (Derrida, 2000:25) within intersectionality in which '...our creativity can spark like a dialectic' (Lorde, 1979b:111).

Chapter 5

Zami: The Epilogue as ‘Myself Apart from Me’

Introduction

Every woman I have ever loved has left her print upon me, where I loved some invaluable piece of myself apart from me - so different that I had to stretch and grow in order to recognize her. (Lorde, 1996:223)

This is the first sentence of the ‘Epilogue’ of *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (Lorde 1996). Where Spivak begins with ‘...“the question of the preface”’ (Spivak, 1997:ix), this chapter begins and remains with the question of the ‘Epilogue’ of Lorde’s biomythography, *Zami*. The question of the ‘Epilogue’ is used here to examine the aporia of positionality. The ‘Epilogue’ as a text inside and outside of text, and interdependent as text of text, is performative of intertextuality and, as such, enables interrogation of these themes in relation to a close re-reading of *Zami*.

This chapter uses Kristeva’s (1969) notion of intertextuality as interchangeable with intersubjectivity, so that ‘...poetic language is read as at least *double*’ (Kristeva, 1969:37; emphasis in original). A close, ‘*double*’ re-reading of the first lines of the ‘Epilogue’ interprets ‘...where I loved some invaluable piece of myself apart from me...’ (Lorde, 1996:223) as reference to inter/intra-subjectivity and inter/intra-textuality. The ‘Epilogue’ is a piece of *Zami* apart from *Zami*, where ‘*Zami: A Carriacou name for women who work together as friends and lovers*’ (Lorde, 1996:223; italics in original) personifies a

plurality of intersubjective encounters across multiple configurations. As such, *Zami* anticipates current postmodernist, feminist and critical race theory debates that privilege concepts of multiplicity, instability and the implications of the ‘constitutive outside’ (Butler, 2004, 2005; Hall, 1996:18). With specific reference to *Zami*, Carlston comments that:

To the idea of coalition between individuals Lorde adds the concept of “positionality,” or individual identity as an unstable construct, constantly (re)produced both by and within the social matrix, and by the subject’s conscious creation of herself. In this regard Lorde prefigures more recent theoretical work by writers like Chandra Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak, and Trinh Minh-ha, while presenting a unique vision of the construction and uses of subjectivity. (Carlston, 1993:226)

The Aporia of the Epilogue as Method

Spivak’s (1997) deconstruction of the preface in *Of Grammatology* opens the question of the ‘Epilogue’ as intertextuality to function as the subject under analysis and a tool of analysis. Thus, the relationship between method and analysis within the structure of this possible re-reading of *Zami* mirrors the intersubjective, intertextual encounters that constitute the play of identity and difference in *Zami*. Spivak writes:

The preface, by daring to repeat the book and reconstitute it in another register, merely enacts what is already the case: the book’s repetitions are always other than the book. There is, in fact, no “book” other than these

ever-different repetitions: the “book” in other words, is always already a “text,” constituted by the play of identity and difference. A written preface provisionally localizes the place where, between reading and reading, book and book, the inter-inscribing of “reader(s),” “writer(s),” and language is forever at work. (Spivak, 1997:xii; parentheses in original)

In terms of applying these principles as a method of close re-reading of *Zami*, the ‘Epilogue’ as a reiteration of identity and difference is used to explore the dialectic of the place of ‘inter-inscribing’ of identity as provisional and localised. This method is used to explore how Lorde grapples with the dialectic of her speaking position, and the instability of an ‘always already’ constitution of language, text and identity. For example, I am concerned with the ways in which the space of myth in the creation of a biomythography grapples with ‘The myth of the positionless speaker...’ (Davies, 1992:54; Davies and Harré, 1990). Spivak comments:

Humankind’s common desire for a stable center, and for the assurance of mastery -through knowing or possessing. And a book, with its ponderable shape and its beginning, middle, and end, stands to satisfy that desire. (Spivak, 1997:xi)

However, as Spivak (1997) demonstrates in her translator’s preface to *Of Grammatology*, and as the text of *Zami* demonstrates, the ‘desire for a stable center’ is displaced due to the impossibility of establishing stability, ‘assurance,’ ‘mastery,’ ‘knowing’ or possession.

The indeterminate place and space of the ‘Epilogue’ in *Zami* enables examination of the tension of simultaneously doing and undoing position. Caselli

describes the tension as ‘...a multiple and changeable notion of textuality which nevertheless configures itself in specific ways’ (Caselli, 2005:4). Recognizing the dialectic of the ‘changeable’ as stuck with, and contingent upon, an inevitable ‘specific’ configuration, the task of this particular analysis goes beyond seeking to resist the binary of certainty for uncertainty. In other words:

To move beyond the idea of authorial intentionality and of a stable prior text entails neither a claim that every meaning can be casually configured and attributed nor a claim that we can do away with the idea of authority. (Caselli, 2005:4)

In short, the task is to stay with the dialectic. The questions of what constitutes the dialectic and how the dialectic is manifest are central to the play of identity and difference. More specifically, it is central to this particular close textual re-reading of *Zami*.

The logic of staying with the dialectic is: firstly, that it is inevitable, and as will become evident, it is inevitable both within textuality and within the activism of Black feminist theory; secondly, that uncovering the constituent elements of the tension and what the tension is contingent upon may uncover how the tension functions; and thirdly, to find out if there is any potential in the dialectic ‘...to effect changes, to challenge prevailing and problematic norms governing textuality’ (Grosz, 1995:11). Thus, the objective is not to resolve, but to explore the irresolvable as a method of close textual analysis.

Using the ‘Epilogue’ of *Zami* as a method by which to interrogate the aporetics of positionality presents a number of intersecting dilemmas. The problem concerns the dangers of the relationship between method and analysis.

The question is: what is driving what? What constitutes what in terms of method, content and analysis? Have the themes under investigation emerged because of the theoretical and philosophical function and place of the ‘Epilogue,’ or is it the other way around? Have the themes given rise to the method of using the ‘Epilogue’? In other words, does the act of using the ‘Epilogue’ as methodology result in a fetishization of the themes? The quandary points to the crux of this chapter concerning the question of ‘...the origin of the origin’ (Derrida, 1997:61), incorporating a questioning of the idea of the trace, and the disruption of logic contingent upon binaries of absence/presence, beginning/end and stability/instability. The tension between method and analysis remains ‘...the very question of being-in-question...’ (Derrida, 2000:3), where the trick is to avoid ‘...“guarding the question”...’ in order to privilege the ‘...unanswerable question...’ (Spivak, 1999:425) and confront the unavailability of solution (Spivak, 1985a:55).

The situation of confronting the unavailability of solution directs attention away from ‘guarding the question’ towards the ‘guarding’ of an ethical re-reading. In other words, refusal of a ‘decided,’ and suspicion of the ‘always already,’ may help to guard against being constrained by predetermined parameters of the question. These tensions concern the question of the ethics of posing a question that is already decided. Derrida explains that ‘[i]f there were a horizon of expectation, if there were anticipation or programming, there would be neither event nor history’ (Derrida and Stiegler, 2002:12). In other words, practices and thinking contingent upon totalization will inevitably be constrained by totalization.

The implication of this in the relationship between politics, responsibility and ethics, indicates that relevance and application of the issues at stake are not confined to textual analysis, literary criticism or academic scholarship. This re-reading of *Zami*, the tension of the method used and the struggles of staying with the ‘possible’ in the ‘impossible’ are fundamental to an ethical and responsible foundation for the political activism of Black feminist theory. In short, the task is to attempt to be with each other as Black and white feminists without an ‘always already’ decided position, question and answer.

Mapping Out the Tensions

The implications and relevance of this analysis reach beyond *Zami*. The tensions explored are the tensions that the activism of Black feminist theory confronts on a daily basis. Primarily, these tensions concern how to change positions configured on notions of essentialism that are oppressive, to different positions configured on notions of fluidity that are liberating. The problem stated earlier by Caselli is that the ‘changeable’ is stuck with, and contingent upon, inevitable ‘specific’ configurations (Caselli, 2005:4). All positions are stuck with being implicated in the language and constructions of a racist, homophobic patriarchy.

The predicament reveals further complications when the content of the subject or speaking position is further broken down in terms of the specificity of particular identity constructions and forms of oppression. For example, this re-reading of *Zami* is relevant to contemporary debates about queer theory and diaspora. The dialectic of positionality is inherent in the challenge of changing racist, homophobic positions, whilst resisting complicity with the very

mechanisms that foreclose, conflate and, ultimately, prohibit creations of valid positions for Black, lesbian and gay people. Wesling picks up these issues in her paper, 'Why Queer Diaspora?' (2008), where she writes:

What does it mean to "queer" diaspora studies? To pose the question more broadly, what analytical possibilities open up when we consider the relation between sexuality, identity, and desire on the one hand, and the geographical mobility, estrangement, or displacement of people on the other? This essay will approach these questions by considering how the contemporary conditions of geographical mobility - the diasporic condition that attends the circumstance of globalization - produce new experiences and understandings of sexuality and gender identity. (Wesling, 2008:30)

As part of her debate, Wesling questions how positions, analyses and scholarship in relation to being queer/queer theory, when juxtaposed with positions, analyses and scholarship in relation to diaspora, function to open up, or foreclose, 'analytical possibilities' (Wesling, 2008:30).

The relevance of *Zami* to these debates is twofold: firstly, *Zami* is concerned with the themes of immigration, geographical and social displacement and mobility, sexuality, gender and international lesbian encounters; and secondly, the preoccupation within *Zami* of these themes to the issues of identity formation, political resistance and asserting Black lesbianism. Furthermore, the relevance of *Zami* to the issues that concern Wesling is demonstrated in the

interview between Nöll-Fischer¹⁸ and Lorde about *Zami*, where Lorde explicitly identifies the themes of Black lesbianism and diaspora:

It is also an attempt to tell a few stories that are normally not told: what it's like to grow up as a black woman in the New York of the forties and become a lesbian woman. It is an attempt to consider how black women out there in the diaspora raise their children, and it has to do with how we articulate our strength. (Nölle-Fischer, 1986: 154)

Wesling summarises her project in the following way:

For it is my contention that it is precisely the critical analogy between gender mobility and geographic mobility that risks mystifying the material and psychic relations it would seem to illuminate. That is, as I will argue, the analogy conceals, by rendering them equivalent, the very links between desire, practice, and material relations that produce gender and sexuality as social formations. This critical move thus occludes the very question it would seem to want to ask: what analytical possibilities open up when we bring queer studies and globalization studies into closer proximity - when we think globally about queerness, and queerly about globalization? (Wesling, 2008: 30)

Perhaps, Lorde's experiences of being a Black lesbian in Mexico, as recounted in *Zami*, allude to some of the possibilities that Wesling refers to:

Eudora wanted to know what I was doing in Mexico, young, Black, and with an eye for the ladies, as she put it. That was the second surprise. We

¹⁸ Karen Nölle-Fischer translated *Zami* into German for Orlanda Press in 1986.

shared a good laugh over the elusive cues for mutual recognition among lesbians. Eudora was the first woman I'd met who spoke about herself as a lesbian rather than as "gay," which was a word she hated. Eudora said it was a north american east-coast term that didn't mean anything to her, and what's more most of the lesbians she had known were anything but gay. (Lorde, 1996:139)

In this passage, the international encounter between these two lesbians opens up a range of issues including: name (to call oneself 'lesbian' or 'gay,' the connotations of name and how the connotations of the label 'lesbian' or 'queer' are specific to location), geography, gender, race and recognition. However, it is apparent from the encounter between Lorde and Eudora that even across geographical borders, there were 'cues for mutual recognition among lesbians' (Lorde, 1996:139). Here, there is something productive, even surprising ('[t]hat was the second surprise' [Lorde, 1996:139]) and freeing up, in the bringing together of being Black, queer and geographically mobile. Indeed, it would seem, from the exchange between Lorde and Eudora, that 'queer' as an identity position is located as much within the person as within geographical locations.

The juxtaposition of *Zami* to current debates about Black lesbianism, as demonstrated above in relation to Wesling, is a dimension of the way in which the themes, literary devices and structure of the text are a part of *Zami* apart from *Zami*. In other words, both the act of re-reading and applications of the re-reading *Zami* exceed the bounds of the text (Barthes, 1967, 1971; Foucault, 1969). Furthermore, in its failure to provide any resolution to dilemmas in terms of application and relevance to other contexts, the struggles and tensions within *Zami*

exceed the bounds of definitive solutions and answers. These principles can be translated to Black feminist texts and, indeed, to all texts. Here, we are brought back again to the opening sentence of the ‘Epilogue,’ ‘...some invaluable piece of myself apart from me...’ (Lorde, 1996:223), where the ‘Epilogue’ functions to reiterate indeterminacy.

This chapter on *Zami* uses the ‘Epilogue’ as a point of reference for important themes that recur throughout the whole text. These themes include temporality, location, space, presence and absence as constitutive of identity. In terms of discursive positioning, the ‘Epilogue’ occupies, and performs, the undecidable in the text. It is possible to see the ‘Epilogue’ function as a supplement. Royle comments that:

The logic of the supplement entails the disruption of what we think we understand by “the end”, as much as “the beginning”. Neither present nor absent, it is ghostly, maddening, something that you can’t finish with. (Royle, 2003:56)

Here we could consider how the notion of the supplement is at work in the context of all sorts of peritexts, such as prefaces, introductions, forewords, afterwords, dedications, acknowledgements, epilogues, postscripts, footnotes, appendices, parentheses and digressions. Reflecting on the strangeness of the supplement, of supplementarity and substitution, inevitably leads to a rethinking of what we might formerly have supposed was the *non-supplementary*. (Royle, 2003:57; emphasis in original)

The implications of ‘rethinking of what we might formerly have supposed was the *non-supplementary*’ (Royle, 2003:57; emphasis in original) go beyond textuality.

The idea of the supplement disrupts hierarchical distinctions between what is determined as primary and secondary, which potentially disturbs oppressive rankings of who is first and last.

Turning to the activism of Black feminist theory, so often relegated to the place of ‘all sorts of peritexts, such as prefaces, introductions, forewords, afterwords, dedications, acknowledgements, epilogues, postscripts, footnotes, appendices, parentheses and digressions’ (Royle, 2003:57), Derrida’s (1997) thinking about the supplement could work as a tool of radical Black feminist subversion.

The ‘Epilogue’ of *Zami* haunts all aspects of the text including the structure, themes and literary devices. The ‘Epilogue’ is both present and absent from the text, neither inside nor outside of the text and, as such, it challenges the borders of the text. The ‘Epilogue’ summons a ghostly inter-textual, intra-textual relationship. In other words, rather than functioning as a neat close or end to the work, indicated in the root meaning of the word ‘epilogue,’¹⁹ the ‘Epilogue’ is disruptive of closure.

Foucault uses the metaphor of ‘a play of mirrors’ to summon the infinite movement of language which, when applied to the ‘Epilogue,’ creates the disruption of closure or death:

Headed toward death, language turns back upon itself; it encounters something like a mirror; and to stop this death which would stop it, it

¹⁹ From the Latin word *epilogus* and from the Greek word *epilogos*, ‘peroration of a speech, equivalent to *epi-* *epi-* + *lógos* word’ meaning conclusion of a speech (Dictionary.com Unabridged, n.d.; emphasis in original).

possesses but a single power: that of giving birth to its own image in a play of mirrors that has no limits. (Foucault, 1977:54)

The supplement of the 'Epilogue' of *Zami* performs the non-linear, disrupted movement within text and between text, frames of references and the ways in which discourse defers and refers back and forth. Thus, the 'Epilogue' functions as a direct mirror and shaper of the movement of identity. As such, the 'Epilogue' reiterates the major theme within *Zami* of negotiating identity. *Zami* is of particular interest in relation to this theme because it concerns the negotiation and articulation of transgressive identity positions.

Transgressive Textual Practices

MacCormack's (2004) critical analysis of perversion emphasises the transgressive potential of using the word 'perversion' as an act rather than a noun. As an act of transgressing the spatial fixity that dominant discourses rely on, MacCormack points to the disruption of the naming and value ascribed to 'perversion' taken up by lesbian and gay people as a disruption of dominant, oppressive social hierarchies (MacCormack, 2004:27-40). The question is that of how to transgress position whilst caught up in the aporetics of positionality. The question takes on particular political imperatives when the position being transgressed is a subjugated standpoint, as is the case with Black, feminist, lesbian standpoints.

The 'Epilogue' provides '...no stable identity, no stable origin, no stable end' (Spivak, 1997:xii) so that any question of '...the book's identity?' (Spivak, 1997:xi) that attempts to anchor the text inevitably fails. Spivak comments that:

The book is not repeatable in its “identity”: each reading of the book produces a simulacrum of an “original” that is itself the mark of the shifting and unstable subject... (Spivak, 1997: xii)

The implications of using Spivak’s analysis here as a theoretical lens of literary criticism extend to the relationships between reader and text, and form, content and meaning. Spivak points to the fact that each encounter between reader and text, and between form, content and meaning, ‘always already’ produces a new ‘spelling’ of name, text and identity.

It would seem, then, that the title, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, captures the essence of this. The fact that the name ‘Zami’ is not a phonetic reconfiguration of the letters within the name ‘Audre Lorde’ indicates that ‘A New Spelling of My Name’ destabilises ‘...puts into question the name of the name’ (Derrida, 1982, cited in Royle, 2003:75). The name ‘Zami’ puts the singularity of location and possession of the name into question. ‘*Zami. A Carriacou name for women who work together as friends and lovers*’ (Lorde, 1996:223; italics in original) locates name within a plurality of relations and within locations of experiences of work, friendship and making love. Lorde puts into question the idea that name is in any sense neutral or apolitical. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* invokes the newness of the intervention of an explicitly Black lesbian text within the context of old racist, homophobic spellings of Black women’s lesbianism in society (Christian, 1985; Smith, 1977; Wall, 2005).

Drawing on the work of Barthes (1967, 1971), Foucault (1969) and Derrida (1984, 1987, 1992a), this chapter interrogates:

...the demise of textual integrity, the abandonment of the search for a singular meaning or a received interpretation...the multiplicity and ambiguity of all texts, their perpetual openness to re-interpretation, which Derrida calls “grafting” or “iterability.” (Grosz, 1995:16)

It could be argued that *Zami* asserts the contestation of ‘received interpretation’ and disrupts notions of discursive ‘integrity’ through the production of multiple and ambiguous subjectivities and subject positions. However, returning to the point made by Grosz (1995) in relation to text, the tension is that of whether the disruption and contestation of subjectivities and subject positions within *Zami* are contingent upon an inherent contradiction.

The contradiction is that the legitimacy of the disruption of the integrity of positions of race, gender and sexuality remain contingent upon an assumed integrity of alternate positions. For example, Lorde contests ‘received’ heterosexual interpretations of her sexuality on the basis of the integrity and re-interpretation of her sexuality as lesbian. Lorde comments that:

...we could not afford to settle for one easy definition, one narrow individuation of self...It was a while before we came to realize that our place was the very house of difference rather [than] the security of any one particular difference. (Lorde, 1996:197)

Here, Lorde abandons ‘...the search for a singular meaning...’ (Grosz, 1995:16) of definition and identity of self. However, in stating that ‘our place was the very house of difference,’ she is in danger of replacing one singularity for another. The word ‘place’ is singular and the use of ‘very’ as an adjective denotes the particularity or actuality of the ‘house of difference.’ The rhetorical shifts in this

passage exemplify the complexity of negotiating shifting positions. Hekman (2000) complicates the situation further by arguing that these assumed alternate positions that go on to form positions taken up in ‘the very house of difference,’ known as identity politics, may function to re-inscribe the very positions that have been imposed upon us which are not of our choosing:

...the identities that women have embraced under the rubric of identity politics are not of their own choosing; they are, rather, precisely those imposed by the society they are challenging...These identities originated in an effort to subordinate these subjects, not free them. (Hekman, 2000:296-297)

Another Meeting

The ramifications of Spivak’s (1997:xii) assertions that identity is not ‘repeatable’ and that each encounter ‘...produces a simulacrum of an “original”...,’ resulting in the ‘shifting and unstable,’ are wide ranging. The acts of deciphering author intention, contesting notions of a correct or accurate (re-)reading and disrupting ideas of the origin of the text are called into question. In turn, the acts of deciphering intention, origin and a correct (re-)reading or understanding of the speech acts and texts of Black feminists need rethinking in the light of the issues that Spivak raises.

The impossibility of identity being ‘repeatable’ undermines the belief in an essentialist or stereotypical identity category. In stark contrast:

Moments of unknowingness about oneself tend to emerge in the context of relations to others, suggesting that these relations call upon primary forms of relationality that are not always available to explicit and reflective thematization. (Butler, 2005:20)

The ‘relations to others’ that Butler speaks of here could be interpreted as the ‘other’ of the text, or, to be more specific, the ‘other’ of *Zami*. Butler is arguing that we do not know what we do not know until it emerges, or that what we do not know about our ‘self’ is not always available and may only become available in certain conditions of ‘relationality.’

Application of these principles to the activism of all feminist theory would suggest that an aspect of the totalizing effect of essentialism is foreclosure of ‘[m]oments of unknowingness’ (Butler, 2005:20). Perhaps analysis of the obstacles to availability of ‘unknowingness’ would be more profitable to feminism than interventions that re-inscribe what is already known. Furthermore, if ‘Moments of unknowingness about oneself tend to emerge in the context of relations to others’ (Butler 2005:20), then perhaps those moments will increase and become more meaningful in direct correlation to the diversity and determinations of relations to others. The activism of all feminist theory would do well to remember Spivak’s (1997:xii) assertion of ‘no stable identity, no stable origin, no stable end.’

With specific reference to *Zami*, Keating emphasises the transformational potential of the encounter between text and experience of the text:

...I want to suggest that the alterations in consciousness Lorde enacts in *Zami* should not be confined to the text. As she reinvents her own

gender/ethnic identity, Lorde reinvents her readers' as well. (Keating, 1996:147; italics in original)

It would seem that the potential for *Zami*, or, indeed, any text to reinvent 'her readers' and alter consciousness, is contingent upon a rigorous inquiry into the method and politics of close re-reading.

The question becomes: how is *Zami* a dramatization of the thoughts and feelings that I/you/we reconstruct, and if this is the case (and I contend that it is), on what premise is this subjective reconstruction justified? Do we rest in a place of knowing or risk venturing into a place of Butler's (2005:20) 'unknowingness'? Here, I am questioning the definite and positive stance on the transformative potential of *Zami* that Keating (1996) proposes. This is not to deny the enduring political significance of *Zami* to intervene in the lives of individuals, collective-working and within the activism of all feminist theory, but it is not a foregone conclusion.

In the 'Epilogue' Lorde speaks of '[a]nother meeting' (Lorde, 1996:223) and, perhaps, the term '[a]nother meeting' could be interpreted as alluding to a process of encounter and experience which is never fixed, or, alternately, which is repeatedly in meeting. Frosh makes explicit the link between '[a]nother meeting' ontologically and another meeting intertextually:

...the realisation that this "other" lies as much within as without - that it is the co-ordinates of inner space which are being mapped, even when the outside world is what is apparently under scrutiny. Put in the literary terms...this recognition of the other within the self becomes an instance of

intertextuality - reading the other, we reconstruct ourselves. (Frosh, 1995:289)

In other words, in *Zami*, form and content perform and embody each other. The multiple, polyvocal, interlinking genres, traditions and inter-texts perform and embody *Zami's* preoccupation with the unstable, multiple subject. Frosh's (1995) comments are particularly pertinent because he brings time and space into the equation.

In summary, the crossing or dissolution of boundaries occurs on all levels and dimensions. *Zami* employs the use of memory, myth, the insertion of fragments of text, poetry, multiple voices and the speech act in and through different people, location, diaspora, historical and social contextualisations, including movements between the internal and external world.

The statement, '[a]nother meeting,' conjures multiple reiterated associations and implications of subject formation through multiple and reiterated encounters or meetings with others. The 'Epilogue' is performative of '[a]nother meeting' in terms of its position and non-linear movement through the rest of the text. Indeed, the 'Epilogue' could be described as '[a]nother meeting' with the rest of the text.

Bearing Witness

In her introduction to *Acts of Narrative Resistance* (2009), Beard explains that a characteristic of narrative resistance is:

In naming their own identities as part of their struggles to challenge domination, the women employing these genres create autobiographical acts of political and narrative resistance. Their texts resist easy classification into traditional generic categories; many of them demonstrate narrative resistance in their form of construction as those who tell their life stories resist the conventions and language of the traditional, male-authored, Euro-American autobiography. (Beard, 2009:1-2)

Using the principles outlined here by Beard, *Zami* is an act ‘...of political and narrative resistance.’ The principle of naming her identity as part of her struggles to challenge domination continues from the title, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, through to the ‘Epilogue,’ both in terms of adopting the proper name ‘Zami’ and in terms of what the name means: ‘*Zami. A Carriacou name for women who work together as friends and lovers*’ (Lorde, 1996:223; italics in original).

Lorde’s descriptions of the cost and risks of living the name ‘Zami’ refute any notions of sentimentality. This is demonstrated in the following passage:

In the gay bars, I longed for other Black women without the need ever taking shape upon my lips. For four hundred years in this country, Black women have been taught to view each other with deep suspicion. It was no different in the gay world. (Lorde, 1996:195)

A more detailed and developed examination of the deep suspicion between Black women that Lorde speaks of here is found in her essay, 'Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred and Anger' (Lorde, 1983a). However, here in this passage Lorde is standing at the bar expressing a longing that resists and stands in defiance of four hundred years of racist, homophobic patriarchal subjugation.

In *Zami* Lorde provides a rich, detailed genealogy of the struggles of being a Black lesbian in America in the 1950s. Speaking about the significance of *Zami* as a historical report of Black lesbianism, Lorde explains that:

...for those who don't know New York, I wanted to give an impression of how it was in the streets of Harlem, in the Bagatelle [Club FJD], what the cold-water flats in New York were. That's what I meant by "history." *Zami* should be as much a historical report about a definite time as a story of black lesbians, as the story of Zami . So I have described what young lesbian women in the Village of the fifties wore, and how that differed from other neighborhoods, from Queens or Brooklyn. I wanted things to live on and not get lost. (Nölle-Fischer, 1986:156; parentheses and italics in original)

The attention to detail in terms of place and road names, dates, buildings, events, fashions and attitudes provide an invaluable insight into the development of Black lesbian feminist struggles within the women's liberation movement.²⁰ *Zami* is an

²⁰ The following excerpts from *Zami* (Lorde, 1996) detail socio-historical and geographical information, including issues of racism: 'In 1936-1938, 125th Street between Lenox and Eighth Avenues...' (8); 'memories of World War II...Long before Pearl Harbor...the public school on 135th Street and Lenox Avenue' (11); '142nd Street' (28); 'Crossing over to the other side of Lenox Avenue, we caught the Number 4 bus down to 125th street, where we went marketing at Weissbecker's...' (30); '...we trudged up Sugar Hill, 145th Street from Lenox to Amsterdam, to trade old comic books at the used comic-book store up on Amsterdam Avenue in Washington Heights, which was an all-white section of town then, in those days before the war, and which is

important and relevant political, social and historical piece of writing. The juxtaposition of mythic spaces with concrete historical and geographical contexts represents the intertextual polyvocal dimension of the biomythography. Lorde's desire that 'I wanted things to live on and not get lost' (Nölle-Fischer, 1986:156) reflects the text's refusal to be fixed to decided temporal and spatial locations. Paradoxically, the specificity of concrete geographical and sociological details in the text functions to establish an authenticity that enables mobility of relevance and application. The key point here is not to confuse relevance and application for authenticity. It is important to keep Griggers' (1994:119) point in mind that '[t]he problem of identity is always a problem of signification in regards to historically specific social relations.'

where my mother now lives' (36); 'We trudged up the hill past Stardust Lounge, Micky's Hair Styling - Hot and Cold Press, the Harlem Bop Lounge, the Dream Cafe, the Freedom Barber Shop and the Optimo Cigar Store which seemed to decorate every important street corner of those years. There was the Aunt May Eat Shoppe, and Sadie's Ladies and Children's Wear. There was Lum's Chop Suey bar, and the Shiloh Baptist mission Church painted white with colored storefront windows, the Record Store...between Bradhurst and Edgecombe Avenues, was the broad expanse of tufted green, surrounded by a high wrought-iron fence, that was Colonial Park' (38); 'It was Pearl Harbour Sunday' (40); p43 'During the war years,[...] She walked to the market on 125th Street...' (43) 'Our new apartment was on 152nd Street between Amsterdam Avenue and Broadway in what was called Washington Heights, and already known as a "changing neighbourhood, meaning one where Black people could begin to find overpriced apartments out of the depressed and decaying core of Harlem...Two weeks after we moved into the apartment, our landlord hanged himself in the basement. The *Daily News* reported that the suicide was caused by his despondency over the fact that he finally had to rent to Negroes. I was the first Black student in St. Catherine's School, and all the white kids in my sixth grade knew about the landlord who hanged himself in the basement because of me and my family. He had been Jewish; I was Black' (45-46; italics in original); 'The summer of 1948 was a time of powerful change all over the world...the girls who were jewfish, and who were making plans to go to Israel and work on a kibbutz in the new nation. The mild-mannered skinny little man in the white sheet had prevailed and India was finally free, but they had killed him for it. There was no longer any doubt in anybody's mind that China would soon be Red China, and three cheers for the communists...Thousands of american [sic] boys had died to make the world safe for democracy, even though my family and I couldn't be served ice cream in Washington, D.C. ' (71) 'This was 1952, the height of the McCarthy era...' (101); '*The Rosenbergs were about to be sacrificed . . . One week later President Eisenhower signed into law an executive decree that said I could eat anything I wanted in Washington, D.C....The Rosenbergs were electrocuted on June 19, 1953 – two weeks after we had picketed the white house [sic]*' (127; italics in original); 'That spring, McCarthy was censured. The Supreme Court decision on the desegregation of schools was announced in the english [sic] newspaper...' (148).

Openly naming the identity of being a Black lesbian in the 1950s came at a high price and could cost Black women their lives (Chinn, 2003). Lorde's testimony of this in *Zami* adds layers of texture and meaning to her political essays on the subject.²¹ Reflecting on the absence of, and resistance to, the threat posed by Black lesbian identity, Smith speaks out about the risks of 'coming out' and being recognised as a Black lesbian feminist in the 1970s:

Even at this moment I am not convinced that one can write explicitly as a Black lesbian and live to tell about it. Yet there are a handful of Black women who have risked everything for truth. Audre Lorde, Pat Parker, and Ann Allen Shockley have at least broken ground in the vast wilderness of works that do not exist. (Smith, 1977:172)

The testimony of being a Black lesbian feminist in the 1940s and 1950s recalled within *Zami* resonate with, and are a resource for, Black lesbian feminists across the world in the twenty-first century, who confront similar issues that Lorde speaks about (Clare, 1999; Miles, 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2011). The following passages from *Zami* document the complexity of these painful struggles in the context of intersecting, multiple oppressions:

To be Black, female, gay, and out of the closet in a white environment, even to the extent of dancing in the Bagatelle, was considered by many Black lesbians to be simply suicidal. (Lorde, 1996:195)

²¹ Almost all of Lorde's political speeches, essays, interviews and journal entries refer to her identity as, or to the subject of being, a Black lesbian feminist. The following essays and speeches are identified here because they were either delivered to a gay and lesbian audience and/or addressed the particularity of being a Black lesbian feminist: Beam, 1984; Cavin, 1983; Lorde, 1977a; Lorde, 1978b; Lorde, 1979e; Lorde, 1979f; Lorde, 1983c; Lorde, 1985; Lorde, 1986; Lorde, 1990; Shapiro, 1987.

Many of us wound up dead or demented, and many of us were distorted by the many fronts we had to fight upon. (Lorde, 1996:196)

The Black gay-girls in the Village gay bars of the fifties knew each other's names, but we seldom looked into each other's Black eyes, lest we see our own aloneness and our own blunted power mirrored in the pursuit of darkness. Some of us died inside the gaps between the mirrors and those turned-away eyes. (Lorde, 1996:197-198)

This chapter is particularly concerned with the instability of identity and the dialectic of positionality. However, in addition, I want to stress that the importance of both the context and impact of Lorde's intervention in the creation of *Zami* is an integral part of that concern. Questions and factual information about who else was writing within this genre are important aspects of that context. This includes the reception of a Black lesbian 'coming out' narrative, *Zami's* explicit erotic, sexual and sensual descriptions of a Black lesbian in love and making love to other women, and the yearning for emotional and physical intimacy with other Black women. Christian (1985) emphasises the political importance of this aspect of *Zami*:

...in blunting the edge of sexuality between women (a sexuality which so threatens society that it denies, even attempts to obliterate, it) we might inadvertently miss critical discoveries about why societies seem to need to restrict, repress women, whether they are nonwhite or white, lesbian or heterosexual, working class or middle class. For example, when we look at the history of the word *lesbian*, we see how its appearance is related to society's fear of women's increasing independence. The word *lesbian* is a

twentieth-century word, cited for the first time in 1908 in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Before that time, a woman's passion for another woman was often subsumed under terms such as *masturbation* or *the secret sin*. Some scholars suggest that the term *lesbian* appears at a time when women are questioning sexual taboos, when discussions about birth control were on the rise, and that the new term was a means of strengthening the stigmatization of nonprocreative female passion as well as a strategy for retarding women's drive towards social independence. The sexual content of the word *lesbian* then, when seen in its social context, seems to me to be critical. (Christian, 1985:5; emphasis in original)

Byrd (2009) provides an important context for understanding the Black lesbian feminist tradition that inspired Lorde to use her identity as a tool of political resistance. Byrd demonstrates that Lorde's insistence on public recognition of her identity was pioneering:

While Lorde was not the first black lesbian feminist, she was among the first to live her life and to practice her politics in the public domain, that is to say, out of the closet. Other black lesbian feminists who came before Lorde in this tradition and who publicly self-defined as lesbian were activist Ruth Ellis and novelist Ann Shockley. Contemporaneous with Lorde were writers and activists Barbara Smith and Pat Parker. The lesbianism of such black feminists as Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Angelina Weld Grimké was perhaps an open secret in some circles, but during their lifetimes it was not public knowledge. As a result of the scholarship of Gloria Hull, Erlene Stetson, Cheryl Wall, and others, we now know that

these pioneering black feminists possessed complex identities. (Byrd, 2009:12-13)

The existence and struggles of the Lesbian Immigration Support Group that meets monthly in Manchester, drawing Black lesbian refugees and asylum-seekers from all over the North West of England, bear witness to the relevance of Lorde's testimony in *Zami*, and within her political essays and speeches. Indeed, the risks and personal and material cost for the Black lesbians who attend this particular group, and in other groups throughout the world, are evidence that suicide, mental health difficulties, isolation, violent physical, verbal and psychological attacks, murder and torture are as common in 2013 as in they were in the 1950s. Keating comments about Lorde that:

...she synthesizes autobiography, biography, fiction, and myth into a hybrid literary form. In her poetry, fiction, and prose she uses revisionist myth to develop an interactional model of identity formation capable of transforming her readers as well as herself. By reinterpreting Yoruban and Fon myths from a twentieth-century black U.S. lesbian-feminist perspective, she constructs cross-cultural personal and collective Africanized identities. (Keating, 1996:14)

The implications of Keating's points reverberate through this chapter in terms of identity formation, and the relationship between text and reader. However, in relation to the relevance of Lorde for Black lesbians today, it is clear that Lorde's 'interactional model of identity formation' (Keating, 1996:14) has the potential to transform feelings of aloneness, self-doubt and lack of hope.

Furthermore, in the tradition of Black feminists over the centuries, Lorde has provided an affirmative legacy.

Lorde uses the strategy of discursive positioning to examine how discourse positions, and constitutes, categories such as the Black lesbian and the Grenadian immigrant. In relation to ‘...transgressive textual practices...’ (Grosz, 1995:18), the issue is to what extent the identifications and provocations that *Zami* induces function to regulate or liberate, inscribe or re-inscribe, and stabilize or destabilise. I have deliberately put a series of binaries together here because, within *Zami*, it is not possible to settle on one or the other and, indeed, this is at the heart of the predicaments that Lorde grapples with in terms of position. Of particular interest is the way in which signifiers are used in the text to reconfigure meaning in order to try to transgress the notion of a bounded identity or subjectivity. I offer a re-reading of the ‘Epilogue’ of *Zami* that explores its potential in terms of:

...a structure of signifiers that absorbs and reconstitutes the signifieds, in that its formal patterns have effects on its semantic structures, assimilating the meanings words have in other contexts and subjecting them to new organization, altering stress and focus, shifting literal meanings to figurative ones, bringing terms into alignment, according to patterns of parallelism. (Culler, 1997:79)

The Problematic of Confrontation

Central to contemporary literary theory and textual analysis are questions about: ‘What is an Author?’; the function of the author; the relationship between text and context; and the question of intention (Barthes, 1967, 1971; Foucault, 1969). These questions, and the literary theory available to explore these questions, constitute both the tools for critical literary analysis and the issues that Lorde grapples with in relation to the production, transgression and discursive positioning of a Black lesbian feminist identity through text. Speaking about the multiple arguments and confrontations of feminism in relation to the discursive positioning and construction of women, De Lauretis comments:

That argument is also a confrontation, a struggle, a political intervention in institutions and in the practices of everyday life. That the confrontation is itself discursive in nature - in the sense that language and metaphors are always embedded in practices, in real life, where meaning ultimately resides - is implicit in one of the first metaphors of feminism: the personal is political. For how else would social values and symbolic systems be mapped into subjectivity if not by the agency of codes (the relations of the subject in meaning, language, cinema, etc.) which make possible both representation and self-representation? (De Lauretis, 1984:3-4)

In relation to *Zami*, the question is: how does Lorde confront and argue with the ‘symbolic systems’ and ‘agency of codes’ that produce her subjectivity, her representation and self-representation? I think the kernel of the issue that De Lauretis (1984) refers to is that confrontations are structured around positions

(that confront each other), even when what is confronted is the notion of a position itself. Anzaldúa summaries the problem as:

All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against. Because the counter-stance stems from a problem with authority - outer as well as inner - it's a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life. At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes...The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react. (Anzaldúa, 2007:100-101)

Returning back to the first sentence of the 'Epilogue' of *Zami*, the words '...I had to stretch and grow in order to recognize her' (Lorde, 1996:223) could be read as leaving 'the opposite bank' in order to attempt the position of being 'on both shores at once' (Anzaldúa, 2007:100). However, the next two sentences of the 'Epilogue' take an interesting turn: 'And in that growing, we came to separation, that place where work begins. Another meeting' (Lorde, 1996:223). Within these sentences 'position' is undecided. There are a number of ways of re-reading these sentences in relation to the challenge set out by Anzaldúa (2007). Perhaps, 'separation, that place where work begins' (Lorde, 1996:223) could be interpreted as 'the split between the two mortal combatants' (Anzaldúa, 2007:100); or, alternately, 'separation, that place where work begins' could be interpreted as an inability to sustain the movement of 'I had to stretch' (Lorde, 1996:223), so that the 'the split between the two mortal combatants' is only temporary. Using the same methods of close re-reading, Anzaldúa's (2007:100) words that '[t]he possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react'

could be interpreted as '[a]nother meeting,' understanding '[a]nother' as 'numerous' and 'meeting' as 'to act.'

Intertextuality

It could be argued that this method of re-reading the epilogue of 'Zami' through Anzaldúa takes the 'woven fabric' (Barthes, 1971:159) of the text and weaves new readings, applications and interpretations through intertextuality. Allen explains that:

The idea of the text, and thus of intertextuality, depends, as Barthes argues, on the figure of the web, the weave, the garment (text) woven from the threads of the "already written" and the "already read". Every text has its meaning, therefore, in relation to other texts...However it is used, the term intertextuality promotes a new vision of meaning, and thus of authorship and reading: a vision resistant to ingrained notions of originality, uniqueness, singularity and autonomy. (Allen, 2000:6; parentheses in original)

Intertextuality is a transformative relationship between one text and another, between text and reader and between different registers or genres. Each of these sets of relations constitutes the weave of *Zami*. For example, referring to *Zami*, Lorde explains that:

It's a biomythography, which is really fiction. It has the elements of biography and history of myth. In other words, it's fiction built from many sources. (Tate, 1982:99)

Here, Lorde identifies different threads in the weave of the text which are performative of the intersecting threads of Black women's identity that are resistant to fragmentary, binary representations of the roles of Black women (Cade Bambara, 1969:123-135).

In an interview with Nölle-Fischer, Lorde troubles the binary of women as either mothers or warriors:

And when I later encountered African mythologies, that was very productive and wonderful and very validating...I found in West Africa, especially in Dahomey...there was a very strong tradition of women - of women who did not draw a line between giving and taking life. In other words, there were women who could be mothers and warriors at the same time...Well, in Dahomey women are both, and that was a known fact to me from the streets of Harlem... (Nölle-Fischer, 1986:157)

Lorde interweaves representations from African mythologies and biographical memory to create what Boyce Davies (1994:86) describes as 'uprising' textuality. The text is uprising in its contestation of Western, imperialist, dominant, Eurocentric discourses. Boyce Davies (1994) uses concepts of 'migratory subjectivities,' 'the politics of location,' 're-mapping,' 're-naming,' and 're-connection' to examine the 'critical movements' of Black women's writing in 're-negotiating their identities' (Boyce Davies, 1994:86). This is captured in the 'Epilogue' in the sentences: 'We carry our traditions with us' (Lorde, 1996:223) and 'I live each of them as a piece of me...' (Lorde, 1996: 223). Keating picks this up in her analysis of *Zami*, where she states that:

In *Zami*, for example, “self”-transformation occurs only in context of others, thus indicating an intersubjective construction of personal identity and an interactional self-naming process. (Keating, 1996:146; italics in original)

This ‘interactional’ aspect of the movement both within and between the text and reader can be seen as part of the dialogical characteristic of Black feminist theory (Hill Collins, 2000:30). It points to the production of Black feminist scholarship as a process of persistent and insistent dialogues with the activism and multiple standpoints of Black feminist theory. Keating explains:

...I want to suggest that the alterations in consciousness Lorde enacts in *Zami* should not be confined to the text. As she reinvents her own gender/ethnic identity, Lorde reinvents her readers’ as well. (Keating, 1996: 147; italics in original)

Print, Tattoo, Trace

Every woman I have ever loved has left her print upon me, where I loved some invaluable piece of myself apart from me - so different that I had to stretch and grow in order to recognize her. And in that growing, we came to separation, that place where works begins. Another meeting. (Lorde, 1996:223)

The use of the word ‘print,’ in conjunction with reference to ‘[e]very woman I have ever loved...,’ takes the reader back to the final sentence of the last chapter of *Zami*:

I never saw Afrekete again, but her print remains upon my life with the resonance and power of an emotional tattoo. (Lorde, 1996:222)

This conjures a complex and multiple inter-relationship between the present and absent woman and lover, 'Afrekete' or 'Kitty' (Lorde, 1996:213), the mythic figure of Afrekete, and the ideas of 'print' and 'tattoo.' 'Afrekete' is a theophany that conjures ideas of the indeterminate sacred and spiritual qualities of Lorde's lesbian relationship with 'Kitty' in contrast to racist, homophobic objectifications of lesbianism (Ball, 2001).

Furthermore, 'Afrekete' becomes the trope that personifies a discursive speaking position that performs the indeterminacy of absence and presence. This is illustrated in the following extract from *Zami*:

Afrekete lived not far from Genevieve's grandmother's house. Sometimes she reminded me of Ella, Gennie's stepmother, who shuffled about with an apron on and a broom outside the room where Gennie and I lay on the studio couch. She would be singing her non-stop tuneless little song over and over and over... And one day Gennie turned her head on my lap to say uneasily, "You know, sometimes I don't know whether Ella's crazy, or stupid, or divine." And now I think the goddess was speaking through Ella also... (Lorde, 1996:220)

Here, the referral and deferral of spatial temporality is performed in a complex, multi-layered interrelation between the characters. Lorde, who through new spelling of her name 'Zami' brings into the equation all those '*...women who work together as friends and lovers*' (Lorde 1996:223), is both part of the text and

apart from the text, performed through ‘...she reminded me...,’ invoking the presence and absence, and shifting proximity of memory.

Gennie is absent in death, but haunts the text performative of unresolved grief. Gennie, who committed suicide by taking ‘...rat poison’ (Lorde, 1996:80), remains in close proximity to the other intimate relationships between Lorde and her other friends and lovers, illustrated in the words: ‘Afrekete lived not far from Genevieve’s grandmother’s house’ (Lorde, 1996:220).

In addition, Ella cannot be fixed as either “...crazy, stupid or divine.” The sentence, ‘She would be singing her non-stop tuneless little song over and over and over...’ embodies the iterability of the undecidable. This is demonstrated in the use of the pronouns ‘she’ and ‘her’ because the pronouns could, at the same time, be tied to the named person, Ella, and to an unnamed. The phrase ‘non-stop’ refuses to be fixed to any beginning or end in the same way as:

...the Text cannot stop (for example on a library shelf); its constitutive movement is that of cutting across (in particular, it can cut across the work, several works)...In the same way, the Text does not stop... (Barthes, 1971:157; parentheses in original)

The word ‘tuneless’ is configured on the simultaneity of presence and absence, sequenced by the lyrical ‘...over and over and over...,’ where three repetitions of ‘over’ refuse to be over.

Then there is ‘Afrekete,’ who is and is not the ‘goddess.’ The ‘goddess’ has the ability, quality and power to invoke memory; ‘...she reminded me of Ella...,’ and the goddess has the ability to speak through Ella, disrupting the

boundaries between absence and presence, time and place, and the origin of the speaking subject, leaving the speech act undetermined and contained. Barthes explains that:

...the whole of the enunciation is an empty process, functioning perfectly without there being any need for it to be filled with the person of the interlocutors. (Barthes, 1967:145)

In relation to the 'print,' the origins of 'print' and 'tattoo' remain undetermined and uncontained. Furthermore, inside and outside of the text, the situation of the utterance, initiations of memory and positionality remain undetermined. The interplay of these elements performs a rhythmic, infinite interplay of intersubjective relations between the women invoked, referred and deferred to. The metaphor of 'print' works to translate and underscore important themes and messages within the text. Lorde opens the 'Epilogue' with the juxtaposition between, and interdependence of, presence and absence, and recognition and separation.

The implications of the ways in which Lorde uses pronouns as the author go beyond reference to '[e]very woman I have ever loved...' to destabilise or initiate '[t]he removal of the Author...' (Barthes, 1967:145). Barthes explains that:

Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance saying *I*: language knows a "subject", not a "person", and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language "hold together", suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it. (Barthes, 1967:145; emphasis in original)

Lorde moves in and between ‘every woman,’ ‘I,’ ‘her,’ ‘me’ and ‘myself’ so that the text works from multiple intersubjective locations of re-reading, performed in the indeterminate position of each pronoun (Barthes, 1967, 1971; Benveniste, 1961, Foucault, 1969). For example, the recognition of ‘her’ in the statement, ‘in order to recognize her,’ could refer to Lorde herself or to another woman ‘I have ever loved,’ or this phrase could be performative of the impossibility of establishing the origin and end of Lorde in relation to other women she has loved and vice-versa; the interdependency serves the function of indeterminacy: ‘...that is to say, to exhaust it...’ (Barthes, 1967:145). The phrase ‘...piece of myself apart from me...’ brings into question any notion of ever being fully present, complete or independent. The idea of a ‘piece of myself apart from me’ is ‘...a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash’ (Barthes, 1967:146). This approach resonates with Minh-ha’s position:

When i say “I see myself seeing myself,” I/i am not alluding to the illusory relation of subject to subject (or object) but to the play of mirrors that defers to infinity the real subject and subverts the notion of an original “I.”...I write to show myself showing people who show me my own showing. I-You: not one, not two. (Minh-ha, 1989:22; parentheses in original)

The Origin of the Origin

Subversion of the notion of an ‘original’ precisely because of deferral to infinity is also fundamental to Derrida’s meaning of ‘trace.’ Derrida explains:

Whether in written or in spoken discourse, no element can function as a sign without relating to another element which itself is not simply present...each “element” – phoneme or grapheme - is constituted with reference to the trace in it of the other elements of the sequence or system. This linkage, this weaving, is the *text*, which is produced only through the transformation of another text. Nothing, in either the elements or the system, is anywhere simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces. (Derrida, 1972, cited in Culler, 2007:99; emphasis in original)

Where Derrida speaks of trace, Lorde uses the word ‘print’ to denote the interdependence, infinite referral and deferral to others where the ‘...piece of myself apart from me...’ resonates with the ‘I-You: not one, not two’ (Minh-ha, 1989:22). Zimmerman (1990:202) argues that rather than creating a merger of differences, the interdependency of differences in *Zami* function to open up spaces for the creation of new concepts of identity.

The question remains that of whether this potential space for the creation of new concepts can exist outside of the implicated space of language. The quandary pushes the potential for the creation of new concepts of identity up against the idea of an implicated indeterminate that refuses any position of separation.

Derrida (1977a) uses the example of a shopping list to demonstrate the relationship between the 'mark' that is the mark on the shopping list and the simultaneous present/absent, sender/receiver position. The shopping list is only useful to the writer of the list who was present when writing the list, but holds the possibility of being absent whilst present either in terms of memory or death, or, to another who is able to be present in the absence of the writer. In other words, both the writer of the shopping list (or any written text) and another who re-reads the shopping list (or any written text) are at once both positioned as present/absent, sender/receiver. The function of the 'mark' is contingent upon the logic of iterability: it rests on being able to re-read and repeat the 'mark.' Transferring these principles to the text of *Zami*, it is possible to interpret Lorde's uses of 'mark,' 'print' and 'tattoo' as that of occupying the simultaneous present/absent, sender/receiver position. Royle (2003:78) calls it '...a question of spectrality at the origin, ghostliness as the structure of signification.'

In the preface to *Of Grammatology*, Spivak pays close attention to Derrida's use and meaning of 'trace,' and comments that:

But his word is "trace" (the French word carries strong implications of track, footprint, imprint), a word that cannot be a master-word, that presents itself as the mark of an anterior presence, origin, master. (Spivak, 1997:xv; parentheses in original)

Although *Zami* troubles the idea of a fixed origin, starting point and end point, at the same time, *Zami* has trouble with not fixing an origin and an end. Whilst *Zami* contests the legitimacy of 'a master-word,' it becomes seduced into displacing 'a master-word' for an alternative 'master.' Of course, the alternative

is a Black lesbian feminist ‘master-word,’ but, nevertheless, it is contingent upon an implicated mark or trace.

The activism of Black feminist theory confronts the same issue and, rather than pretending or ignoring the predicament, perhaps it would be more productive for Black feminist theory to be active in exploring this dialectic. The name ‘Zami,’ just like the name ‘Black feminist,’ draws on a tradition of Black women’s writing and autobiography (Braxton, 1989) and history which locate identity and experience beyond any stable, singular context or signifier.

Royle explains that:

It is in many ways perhaps helpful to think of Derrida’s work in terms of the *mark*, rather than of “text” or “writing” in the traditional, narrow sense of these words. (Royle, 2003:68; emphasis in original)

The use of the metaphors ‘print’ and ‘tattoo’ in *Zami* is not restricted to words or text. The reference to ‘...emotional tattoo’ (Lorde, 1996:222) indicates that it is experiential, and constitutive of subjectivity and inter-subjective relations. The marks on the pages that form *Zami* communicate that the work of the ‘mark’ is not restricted to words, letters and ink on paper; rather, the ‘mark’ extends to all experience and beyond. Derrida explains that:

...a “text” that is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. Thus the text overruns all the limits assigned to it... (Derrida, 1977b:69)

The print, tattoo, mark and trace are boundless; they cannot be contained in time, place or space. Any notion of a recognizable, neat, linear relation is challenged. Spivak (1999:424) explains that ‘This track, of a previous differentiation and a continuous deferment, is called “trace.”’

Both Lorde’s experience, and the impact of her experience in the consciousness of the reader, move beyond, and cannot be contained by, the text of *Zami*. Here, the potential for using *Zami* as a resource for the activism of Black feminist theory is located. The ‘mark’ or Lorde’s ‘print’ continually requires, and results in, ‘Another meeting’ (Lorde, 1996:223). Perhaps Black feminist theory could be represented and practiced as an infinite referral and deferral of ‘[a]nother meeting’ that ‘overruns all the limits assigned to it...’ (Derrida, 1977b:69). Spivak comments that:

...I shall begin with “trace/track,” for it is a simple word; and there also seems, I must admit, something ritually satisfying about beginning with the “trace.” (Spivak, 1997:xv-xvi)

Indeed, there is ‘...something ritually satisfying about beginning...’ the ‘Epilogue’ with the word ‘print’ in the first sentence. Thus, what is performed is the beginning of the end. The structure of the first paragraph of the ‘Epilogue,’ and specifically through the ‘mark’ of the word ‘print,’ is a disruption of temporal spatial points of reference - namely, the beginning and the end. Derrida comments that:

The trace is not only the disappearance of origin...it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by

a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin.
(Derrida, 1997:61)

‘My Mother’s Mortar’

The ‘origin of the origin’ (Spivak, 1997:xviii) is invoked and personified in the position of the figure of ‘mother’ from the ‘Epilogue’ of *Zami* through to the ‘Prologue’ to *Zami* and from the ‘Prologue’ through to the ‘Epilogue.’ For example:

Once *home* was a long way off, a place I had never been to but knew out of my mother’s mouth. I only discovered its latitudes when Carriacou was no longer my home. There it is said that the desire to lie with other women is a drive from the mother’s blood. (Lorde, 1996:223-224; emphasis in original)

So, we have the situation where the ‘Epilogue,’ located within the final pages of *Zami*, reiterates the position of ‘mother’ as the ‘drive’/origin of lesbian desire. This is in stark contrast to society’s prevalent stereotype of lesbianism as the consequence of a failure of motherhood. Here, it is evident that *Zami*, as an ‘act of narrative resistance’ (Beard, 2009:2-3), troubles the signification of the trope ‘mother,’ and the relationship between ‘mother,’ desire and sexuality. Anatol (2001) uses the idea of ‘border crossings’ in her analysis of the ways in which Lorde’s lesbianism is intertwined both with her heritage and her relationship with her mother in *Zami*.

Furthermore, society's homophobic constructions of a failure of motherhood as the origin and end result of lesbianism are an example of how the demarcations between beginning and end are used as tools of oppression. This point is articulated by Christian:

Society has tended to blame the mother for the daughter's lesbianism. Lorde sees her mother as her starting point, but she turns the analysis on its head. She celebrates her mother's qualities, her strength, her perceptions, her sensitivity, rather than society's view of the lesbian's mother as diseased, as somehow bringing up her daughter in the wrong way. In beginning with her mother's character, then, Lorde does more than present her own development; she attacks one of society's most persistent interpretations of the origin of lesbianism, an interpretation that denigrates all women. (Christian, 1985:15)

Within *Zami* 'mother' is 'the origin of the origin' (Spivak, 1997:xviii) of what is most fundamental and precious to Lorde; for example, in relation to poetry (Lorde, 1996:21) and her lesbianism.

Perhaps one of the most poetic, sensual and erotic passages in the text is the description of Lorde sat between her 'mother's spread legs' and 'nuzzling' beside her mother in bed:

Sitting between my mother's spread legs, her strong knees gripping my shoulders tightly like some well-attended drum, my head in her lap, while she brushed and combed and oiled and braided. I feel my mother's strong, rough hands all up in my unruly hair... (Lorde, 1996:22)

I remember the warm mother smell caught between her legs, and the intimacy of our physical touching nestled inside of the anxiety/pain like a nutmeg nestled inside its covering of mace. (Lorde, 1996:22)

It could be argued that the figure of ‘mother’ within *Zami* is an example of troubling the ‘order of discourse’ (Foucault, 1981), where the discourse of the Black mother figure is destabilised. In *Zami* ‘mother’ is a site of paradox and contradiction. The preoccupation in the text with the transgression of the conditions of a racist, homophobic patriarchy enables Lorde to transgress or destabilise the rules that govern these conditions, including mother-daughter relations.

In ‘My Mother’s Mortar,’ Lorde (1977b) offers another evocative, erotic and transgressive representation of ‘mother.’ The scene of the mother-daughter encounter is within the domesticity of the kitchen centred on ‘My mother’s mortar...’ (Lorde, 1977b:188), which comes to signify home - a location of racial heritage, diaspora, gender, the erotic and survival:

Every West Indian woman worth her salt had her own mortar. (Lorde, 1977b:188)

Now where the best mortars came from I was never really sure, but I knew it must be...called “home.” “Home” was the West Indies, Grenada or Barbados... (Lorde, 1977b:188)

These next excerpts from ‘My Mother’s Mortar’ resonate with ideas of the indeterminacy, instability and fluidity of gender and the erotic found in the ‘Prologue’ to, and ‘Epilogue’ of, *Zami*:

The mortar was of a foreign fragrant wood, too dark for cherry and too red for walnut...There were rounded plums and oval indeterminate fruit, some long and fluted like a banana, others ovular and end-swollen like a ripe alligator pear...I loved to finger the hard roundness of the carved fruit... (Lorde, 1977b:188)

Up again, down, around, and up, so the rhythm would begin. The thud push rub rotate and up, repeated over and over; the muted thump of the pestle on the bed of grinding spice, as the salt and pepper absorbed the slowly yielded juices of the garlic and celery leaves and became moist... (Lorde, 1977b:191)

My mother...put her heavy arm around my shoulders. I could smell the warm herness rising from between her arm and her body, mixed with the smell of glycerine and rosewater, and the scent of her thick bun of hair. (Lorde, 1977b:198)

In reply to the questions that Foucault asks:

How, under what conditions, and in what forms can something like a subject appear in the order of discourse? What place can it occupy in each type of discourse, what functions can it assume, and obeying what rules? (Foucault, 1969:118)

These excerpts from *Zami* and 'My Mother's Mortar' are examples of how Lorde transgresses racist, homophobic patriarchal rules about the domestic space of the kitchen, the signification of the 'mother' figure, 'uses of the erotic,' sexual taboos and the writing genre of biography. Of course, it is never an either/or position of

to be or *not to be* in ‘the order of discourse,’ but, as Kemp (2004) argues, the juxtaposition of being Black and being a lesbian opens up space for subversion of that order.

Electrical Sparks of the Dialectic

Both Lorde and Derrida, in their own particular ways, explore the relationship between difference and interdependency. These two different theoretical approaches both resonate with, and push at, each other. This is a good example of how the juxtaposition of deconstructionism and the activism of Black feminist theory enables what Bhabha calls a ‘...translational move that opens up an interstitial space for the negotiation of meaning, value, judgment...’ (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000c:376). Furthermore, the method and tools of the analysis can be seen to reflect, embody and perform the subject under analysis. It is a mutually constitutive relation. Thus, what becomes apparent is interdependency between the content and form of the text, the possible re-readings and the tools for those possible re-readings. In her essay, ‘The Master’s Tool Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House’ (1979b), Lorde speaks at length about the connection between the concepts and experiences of difference and interdependency:

Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening...Within the interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge... (Lorde, 1979b:111)

Both Derrida and Lorde locate the space of the dialectic as a site empty of threat and, as such, as a site for creativity. Interdependency of difference becomes less threatening in the situation of removal of hierarchical rankings of first and last, privilege and foreclosure, and absence and presence. Lorde's reference to 'spark like a dialectic' resonates with Lesnik-Oberstein's (1994) use of the metaphor of 'electrical sparks' to examine the construction, function, implications and the potential of deconstructionism:

Deconstruction does not, by my reading, strive towards the nihilism that "everything means everything, therefore nothing means anything", as is so often claimed (hence the frequent equation of deconstruction with "destruction"). This view of deconstruction, I think, comes forth out of some critics' inability to take seriously, whether they ultimately agree with it or not, deconstruction's rejection of a "real" world outside constructed meaning. I take deconstruction to work with the notion of a type of three-dimensional, ever-moving ball of electrical sparks of meaning: meaning is not located "in" the poles between which the sparks jump - indeed to deconstruction these poles do not "exist" - it is the streaks of light left behind by the sparks, the "traces", which represent meaning. The paths the sparks seem to draw create relationships of "différance" which are what meaning *is*. Hence each meaning (for instance "male", "logic", "nature") is determined by what it is and is not ("female", "object", "absence", "madness", "chaos", "irrationality", "civilization", "freedom", "presence"). If the electrical activity of the network ceases, or exhausts itself, "aporeia" is achieved - the draining-away of meaning. (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994:21; parentheses and emphasis in original)

Application of Lesnik-Oberstein to Lorde's proposal that differences are '...a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic' (Lorde, 1979b:111) provides a theoretical lens that sees 'the poles' as social constructions that are 'determined by what it is and is not,' unstable to the point of non-existence.

Thus, rather than getting caught up in questions of whether the 'necessary polarities' that constitute difference should be tolerated or not, or pose a threat or not, energy should be directed towards the 'electrical sparks' generated between the polarities and '...the streaks of light left behind by the sparks, the "traces", which represent meaning' (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994:21). The act of deciphering what constructions should be tolerated or not edges dangerously close to an unwitting acceptance of (rather than a rejection of) '...a "real" world outside constructed meaning' (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994:21).

In other words, Lesnik-Oberstein and Lorde direct attention towards what we can learn from, and how we can use the situation where, the electrical activity within the 'network' of oppressive constructions 'ceases, or exhausts itself.' I would argue that the 'creativity' that Lorde envisions for the activism of all feminist theory can be found within the 'draining-away of meaning' or "aporia."

Différance and Biomythography

Shiach argues that:

Différance is that which allows the production of meaning. It involves a plethora of relationships across time. Meaning is always constituted by both structural differences and temporal deferrals - and this temporal element is what we have lost in our concept of “difference”...The question then becomes how such a complex relation can be representable: “*différance* as temporization, *différance* as spacing. How are they to be joined?” One answer, I believe, lies in theatre, which organizes its representations explicitly along both temporal and spatial axes... (Shiach, 1989:270-271; italics in original)

It could be argued that *Zami* uses Fon and Yoruba mythology as a medium of joining up the ‘plethora of relationships across time’ and space. The drama of the interaction between Fon and Yoruban figures, and the symbolic function of each these figures disrupts any fixed structure of positive terms embodied in the creation of biomythography. Both the potential of myth, and of mythic spaces to disrupt discursive practices, are dependent upon whether they stand outside of the fixed structure of positive terms.

The creation of a biomythography is in itself a transgression of apparently fixed borders of writing genres. However, in order to avoid slipping into a myth of the myth, so to speak, where myth is in danger of being ascribed an either/or quality that is literal or metaphorical, it is imperative to remember that myth is a construction ‘...which has the pretension of transcending itself...’ (Barthes, 1973:145). Thus, just as constructions are constituted, constrained and implicated

by language/discourse, so, too, is myth. I contend that taking the potential of myth seriously must ‘...take seriously...deconstruction's rejection of a “real” world outside constructed meaning’ (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994:21).

I want to foreground two particular theoretical approaches to the critical analysis of Fon and Yoruban mythology - namely, a critical feminist approach and a Black literary criticism approach. Both approaches have evolved within the dialectic and dialogic of suppression and are modes of resistance to that suppression including ‘...the rejection of terms such as “primitive” and “savage”; as “civilized” and “barbarian” or “backward”; as “greater” or “lesser” tradition’ (Herskovits and Herskovits, 1998:4). Lorde draws on, and articulates, aspects of both approaches in the creation of her biomythography. Foregrounding a feminist deconstructionist textual analysis allows paradoxes, contradictions and internal instabilities to surface in this close re-reading of the ‘Epilogue’ of *Zami*. Grosz summarizes the challenge in the following way:

Only a political or theoretical commitment that can confront its own internal paradoxes, its inherent or constitutive inconsistencies, and its necessary if changeable limits can be said to have come of age. (Grosz, 1995:59)

Feminist approaches emphasise the extent to which Black feminist Fon and Yoruban mythology in a text such as *Zami* displaces and challenges phallogocentric bias found in hegemonic, Judeo-Christian, Western narratives and definitions of women (Bowen, 2003; Davies, 1992; Keating, 1992, 1996; Provost, 1995). This approach emphasises the success of the transformational impetus of including non-Western mythology and spirituality. An example here would be the

work of Keating (1996). Speaking of Gunn Allen, Anzaldúa and Lorde, Keating comments that:

...they use revisionist myths to invent alternate forms of knowledge that posit the interconnectedness of the spiritual and material dimensions of life. They create new ways of thinking that displace the boundaries between inner/outer, subject/object, spirit/matter, and other dichotomous terms. (Keating, 1996:20)

Black literary criticism emphasises the function of myth in the tradition, form, content and theory of Afro-American literature (Gates, Jr., 1988). This approach seeks to identify, articulate and make explicit the rich complexity of the theory of Afro-American literary criticism. Gates, Jr. is clear that ‘...the black tradition has inscribed its own theories of its nature and function within elaborate hermeneutical and rhetorical systems’ (Gates, Jr., 1988:xiv). In articulating a ‘black metaphysics’ (Gates, Jr., 1988:xiii) through African, Caribbean and Afro-American literary traditions, Gates, Jr. argues, ‘...that the central questions asked in Western critical discourse have been asked, and answered, in other textual traditions as well’ (Gates, Jr., 1988:xiv). The critical interventions of Gates, Jr. (1988) and Keating (1996) question ‘...racist and sexist presuppositions...’ (Gates, Jr., 1988:xv) that position Eurocentric narratives, theory and constructions as dominant and superior.

Gates, Jr.’s use of Derrida’s thinking about signification and the use of signifiers provides a lens through which to analyse the creation, disruption and challenge of signifiers within *Zami*. Of particular interest is the way *Zami* manipulates Fon and Yoruban figures as signifiers in order to reconfigure the

signified. An example of this can be seen in the ways in which Lorde uses the female 'Afrekete' as 'MawuLisa's' youngest daughter and not the male incarnation of 'Eshu/Legba.' In the 'Epilogue' Lorde writes: '*...and Afrekete, her youngest daughter, the mischievous linguist, trickster, best-beloved, whom we must all become*' (Lorde, 1996:223; italics in original). This manoeuvre is an example of transgressive textual production/practice and discursive positioning at work, to great effect, as the importance of the symbolic function of 'Eshu/Legba' is realised. Displacing 'Eshu/Legba' for 'Afrekete' has far-reaching implications. Keating comments:

Eshu/Legba is a perpetually liminal figure, a mediator symbolizing the disruption of boundaries that bring about personal, social, and cosmic change. In Fon metaphysics Legba's meditational role is highly disruptive yet viewed in a positive light...in Yoruban cosmology Eshu represents the boundary transgression leading to new combinations in a never-ending process of transmutation and change. (Keating, 1996:165)

Gates, Jr. comments:

Metaphysically and hermeneutically, at least, Fon and Yoruba discourse is truly genderless, offering feminist literary critics a unique opportunity to examine a field of texts, a discursive universe, that escaped the trap of sexism inherent in Western discourse. (Gates, Jr., 1988:30)

Zami uses myth to express the desire to transcend fixed structures of identity in recognition of '*...pieces of myself apart from me - so different...*' (Lorde, 1996:223). In her detailed analysis of 'Afrekete,' the trickster in the work of Lorde, Provost suggests that:

...as a woman and a lesbian, Lorde found resonance in the fluid gender orientation and free engagements in unconventional, even taboo, sexual practices that these trickster figures enact...With their verbal dexterity, indeterminacy, gender ambiguity, and ability to mediate seeming contradictions, I believe Afro-Caribbean trickster figures - particularly in the incarnation of Afrekete - offer Lorde both a model survivor/fighter and particular linguistic strategies which aid her struggle against oppressive beliefs and behaviors. (Provost, 1995:47)

The figure 'MawuLisa' functions to represent *différance* as temporization and spatialization on a number of levels. 'MawuLisa' moves across the space and temporality of *Zami*, pulling together the 'Prologue' and the 'Epilogue.' This is represented in the questioning of the 'always already' fixed constructions of gender and sexuality expressed as a desire within the 'Prologue' and personified by 'MawuLisa.' In the glossary of *The Black Unicorn* (1995), Lorde explains that '...Mawulisa is the Dahomean female-male, sky-goddess-god principle' (Lorde, 1995:120). This is demonstrated in the 'Epilogue' where Lorde interweaves myth with biography:

Ma-Liz, DeLois, Louise Briscoe, Aunt Anni, Linda, and Genevieve; MawuLisa, thunder, sky, sun, the great mother of us all; and Afrekete, her youngest daughter, the mischievous linguist, trickster, best-beloved, whom we must all become. (Lorde, 1996:223; italics in original)

Lorde goes on to state that:

Their name, selves, faces feed me like corn before labor. I live each of them as a piece of me, and I choose these words with the same grave

concern with which I choose to push speech into poetry, the mattering core, the forward visions of all our lives. (Lorde, 1996:223)

It is also interesting to note that Anzaldúa (2007) uses ‘corn’ to signify the strength, resource and complexity of her identity as a woman, as a mixed race woman and as a lesbian:

...like corn, the *mestiza* is a product of crossbreeding, designed for preservation under a variety of conditions. Like an ear of corn - a female seed-bearing organ - the *mestiza* is tenacious, tightly wrapped in the husks of her culture. Like kernels she clings to the cob; with thick stalks and strong brace roots, she holds tight to the earth - she will survive the crossroads. (Anzaldúa, 2007:103; emphasis in original)

MawuLisa represents the ‘crossroads’ of non-fixed gender category:

The primal god of the Fon is a Janus figure; one side of its body is female and is called Mawu, while the other side is male and is called Lisa. Mawu’s eyes form the moon; Lisa’s eyes form the sun. Accordingly, Lisa rules the day and Mawu rules the night. The seventh son of Mawu-Lisa is Legba. Legba is the wild card of Fon metaphysics, the wandering signifier. (Gates, Jr., 1988:23)

It could be argued that the intervention of Lorde’s biomythography anticipated the debates within feminist and queer theory that have evolved, and are evolving, concerning gender signification, and the relationship between gender and sexuality (Butler, 1990a, 1990b, 1993a, 1993b, 2006; Namaste, 2000; Stryker, 2008; Whittle, 2002). In the ‘Prologue’ Lorde states:

I have always wanted to be both man and woman, to incorporate the strongest and richest parts of my mother and father within/into me - to share valleys and mountains upon my body the way the earth does in hills and peaks. I would like to enter a woman the way any man can, and to be entered - to leave and to be left... (Lorde, 1996:xvi; italics in original)

In the context of this chapter, the words ‘...to leave and to be left...’ conjure up the ‘print’ of ‘[e]very woman I have ever loved...’ (Lorde 1996:223) in the ‘Epilogue.’ The conceptual framework of *difference*, including notions of undecidability, and the trace and transgression of temporal and spatial borders, are invoked within the particularity of transgressive gender, race and sexual desire. This is an example of how *Zami* performs what Keating (1996:4) names as ‘threshold locations’ and ‘threshold identities.’ It is an example of how iterability, polyvoice and inter-textual, intra-textual relations in *Zami* perform what Derrida (1998:14) called the ‘disorder of identity.’ Lorde explains that:

Eshu is a prankster, also, a personification of all the unpredictable elements in life. He is often identified with the masculine principle, and his primary symbol is frequently a huge erect phallus. But Eshu-Elegba has no priests, and in many Dahomean religious rituals, his part is danced by a woman with an attached phallus. (Lorde, 1995:119-120)

Lorde’s engagement with African Fon mythology is reiterated throughout her work. This engagement allowed Lorde to consciously forge a connection with her African heritage, demonstrated through:

...researching ancient myths for more than two decades; traveling to west Africa with her partner and two children in the mid-1970s; absorbing

diasporan stories into her being to create new myths of a feminist vision to strengthen herself for the continuing battles. Concomitantly, her rejection of the patriarchal Catholic religion of her youth left her with the need to formulate a cosmology in which to center her deep sense of spirituality and love of ritual. Creating her own special relationships with the deities, she chose Afrekete as her special goddess. (Bowen, 2003:117)

Margins of the 'Law'

Lorde's response to *How to Do Things with Words* (Austin, 1975) is to position words, letters and nouns outside of the margin, off the page. In the 'Epilogue' Lorde describes:

There were four half-finished poems scribbled on the bathroom wall between the toilet and the bathtub, others in the window jambs and the floorboards under the flowered linoleum, mixed up with the ghosts of rich food smells. (Lorde, 1996:223)

In the context of this chapter, the 'between' position of writing described in *Zami* is representative of intertextuality and resonates with Barthes (1971:160) statement that the '...intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text...' In the relation of intertextuality as intersubjectivity the 'between,' 'under,' and 'in' the 'floorboards' and 'jambs' embody:

...those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the

subject, but whose living under the sign of the “unlivable” is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. (Butler, 1993a:3)

Thus, I propose that the ‘half-finished poems scribbled’ and ‘others’ (Lorde, 1996:223) of fragments/unfinished texts are positioned within ‘...“unlivable” and “uninhabitable” zones...’ (Butler, 1993a:3). It is interesting to note the textual move between ‘poems scribbled’ and ‘others’ in the social context of a racist, homophobic patriarchy, where the ‘others’ are those ‘...who do not enjoy the status of the subject...’ (Butler, 1993a:3) are located in the illegitimate in-between spaces that are ‘under’ (Lorde, 1996:223) those who are dominant. The point is that, as ‘an act of narrative resistance’ (Beard, 2009), *Zami* disrupts demarcated ‘zones,’ ‘the status of the subject’ and ‘the sign of the “unlivable”’ (Butler, 1993a:3). The words ‘mixed up with the ghosts’ (Lorde, 1996:223) conjure the idea that categories of race, gender and sexuality ‘...within political discourse will be haunted in some ways by the very instabilities that the categories effectively produce and foreclose’ (Butler, 1993a:4). Furthermore, ‘mixed up with the ghosts’ is reiterative and prophetic of the themes that haunt the text:

We spent so much of our young-womanhood trying to define ourselves as woman-identified women before we even knew the words existed, let alone that there were ears interested in trying to hear them beyond our immediate borders. (Lorde 1996:197)

In *Zami* where the intertextual is performative of the intersubjective, the things that words do (Austin, 1975) include the creation of a speaking subject that:

...thus reproduces in the reading subject the experience of splitting, the tautness generated by the stretching between identifications and otherness, between sameness and difference. (Beard, 2009:35)

An example of this can be seen early on in *Zami*, when Lorde is required by the school teacher to write her name in ‘...special short wide notebooks...with very widely spaced lines on yellow paper’ (Lorde, 1996:14).

It is possible to interpret the example of Lorde’s experience of staying within the ‘spaced lines’ as bringing together the significance of the margin in conjunction with the significance of social laws of regulation:

...the fact that there is a general social law, that this law is the symbolic dimension which is given in language and that every social practice offers a specific expression of that law. (Kristeva, 1973:25)

Here, Kristeva opens up the aporia of the law, and the significance of this in relation to *Zami* becomes the predicament of using language and social practice to confront the aporia that language and ‘...every social practice offers a specific expression of that law’ (Kristeva, 1973:25). Indeed, this is the predicament of the activism of Black feminist theory in the context of the regulations and limitations of a racist, homophobic patriarchy.

As discussed earlier (Chapter 1), Lorde was aware at the age of four not to let the Y hang ‘...down below the line in Audrey...’ like a tail; instead, she ‘...used to love the evenness of AUDRELORDE...’ (Lorde 1996:14). However, and this is where a manifestation of the ‘law’ figures:

...I remembered to put on the Y because it pleased my mother, and because, as she always insisted to me, that was the way it had to be because that was the way it was. No deviation was allowed from her interpretations of correct. (Lorde, 1996:14)

The quotation above reflects the complex manoeuvres of the law of a racist, homophobic patriarchy that uses the relationship between a Black mother and her Black daughter to transmit the law. Oppressive acts of female genital mutilation, foot binding and forced marriages, in conjunction with discourses of shame and blame, are transmitted through mothers, sisters, mother-in-laws, daughters and matriarchal figures within communities and families. Lorde explains prophetically and with irony that ‘I had never been too good at keeping between straight lines no matter what their width...’ (Lorde, 1996:15). Lorde proceeds to write her name:

...slanted down across the page something like this:

A

U

D

R

E

The notebooks were short and there was no more room for anything else on that page. So I turned the page and went over, and wrote again, earnestly and laboriously, biting my lip,

L

O

R

D

E...

(Lorde, 1996:15)

The situation and response (by her teacher) that Lorde is confronted with in performing this act is explained by Moi as:

...the desire to produce a discourse which always confronts the *impasse* of language (as at once subject to and subversive of the rule of the Law), a discourse which in a final aporetic move dares to think language against itself, and in so doing knowingly situates itself in a place which is, quite literally, untenable. (Moi, 1986:10; emphasis in original)

Lorde finds herself ‘...at once subject to and subversive of the rule of the Law...,’ epitomised both in her willingness to walk ‘...over rice on my knees to please Mother’ (Lorde, 1996:15) and in the scolding from her school teacher: ‘You don’t even want to try and do as you are told’ (Lorde, 1996:16).

Other instances of Lorde’s transgression of the ‘Law’ of social and institutional regulation include the time she spent working at ‘Keystone

Electronics' factory (Lorde 1996:106). In order to earn enough money to travel to Mexico, Lorde recalls that:

I could not even tell Ginger how I was managing to pull down such high bonuses, although she often asked. The truth was, I would slip crystals into my socks every time I went to the bathroom. Once inside the toilet stall, I chewed them up with my strong teeth and flushed the little shards of rock down the commode. I could take care of between fifty and a hundred crystals a day in that manner, taking a handful from each box I signed out. (Lorde, 1996:125)

A close re-reading of this passage brings to mind the context of being in the bathroom and the reference to toilet made in the 'Epilogue.' In both contexts there is a transgression of the 'Law.' In the 'Epilogue' the 'between the toilet and the bathroom' functioned as a space for 'half-finished poems scribbled' and here in the factory 'the toilet stall' is the place of the act of transgression. Thus, in both instances, the act and the actor of transgression are situated within '...“unlivable” and “uninhabitable” zones of social life...' (Butler, 1993a:3). The testimony of transgressive acts that have confronted, and continue to confront, social injustice throughout the world demonstrate that being in the “unlivable” and “uninhabitable” zones' does not prevent political activism.

Lorde's use of the slant down across the page, neither a straight vertical column nor a horizontal row, is perhaps symbolic of a message more complicated than a rejection of being identified as 'straight.' This complexity is captured in the statement:

I have often wondered why the farthest-out position always feels so right to me; why extremes, although difficult and sometimes painful to maintain, are always more comfortable than one plan running straight down a line in the unruffled middle. (Lorde, 1996:6)

Read in conjunction with Watson (1992), who uses Butler's (2006) criticism of lesbian identity as an '...oppositional structure of heterosexuality...' (Watson, 1992:397), the 'farthest-out position' represented by the slant across the '...very widely spaced lines on yellow paper...' (Lorde, 1996:14) could be interpreted as:

...the notion of multiple, fragmentary, fluid postures around a set of dissonant sexual roles opens up an interplay between hetero – and homosexual categories that destabilizes both. Such a theory would have potential for a politics of reading identity differently - reading it, that is, as a negotiation among fixed possibilities that both resists and remakes the representation of human experience. In such a negotiation the unspeakable would be mapped as what becomes speakable when boundaries are traversed, articulated, confused, and undone. (Watson, 1992:397)

Conclusion

Zami is part of a feminist tradition of using myth and experimental fiction fused with political analysis to attempt alternative, disruptive frames of thinking (Bhattacharyya, 1997; Haraway, 1991; Wittig, 1969). I particularly like the way that Griggers (1994) takes up Benjamin's (1978) idea of the destabilization of the

origin of an original work of art, and applies it to the issues of an indeterminate origin, repetition and destabilisation of positionality. I would argue that *Zami* adds a Black feminist dimension to debates about ‘techno-fetishization of technologies’ in a ‘(post)mechanical’ (Griggers, 1994:120) era where:

...(post)mechanical reproduction marks the difference between an economy of representation, in which representative power is used to maintain belief in the harmony of the socius, and an economy of repetition, which is characterised by repetitive mass production of all social relations . . .The cultural reproduction of lesbian bodies in the age of (post)mechanical reproduction, that is, in an economy of simulacral repetition, has more than ever destroyed the aura of an “original” lesbian identity... (Griggers, 1994:120-121)

The point is that the creation of the biomythography, *Zami*, belongs to, and anticipates, imaginary and actual transformative spaces/interventions that constitute and transgress subject and identity positions. These interventions are particularly useful in creating alternative regimes of seeing (Bhattacharyya, 1997). However, as this chapter has demonstrated, in adopting any position from which to gaze, the following questions must always be asked: what is outside of view? What is not seen? How is the gaze totalizing that which is in view? Foregrounding any issue, method or gaze inevitably excludes or shadows that which is not in the foreground.

Indeed, the same principle applies to (re-)reading against the/a grain even when the grain is patriarchy, racism and homophobia. I wish to conclude with a quote from Davies (1992) that encapsulates the aporia of positionality and the

problematics of methodology examined in this chapter, with specific reference to *Zami* and the activism of Black feminist theory in general:

Davies argues that:

The lived and imaginary narratives that we generate in our attempt to speak into existence a different way of being outside the male/female dualism need to achieve several contradictory purposes. We need stories that are elaborations of existing stories that mark their problematic nature. We need not only see the problems in rational, didactic terms (though we need that too) but to see freshly the images and metaphors and story lines we have grown up with and learn to read them against the grain. The desire to read them against the grain does not simply come with knowing what those alternative readings are, however, because the old story lines, through which old discourses are lived out, inevitably compete for our attention. Any reading against the grain implies a detailed knowledge of the grain itself. (Davies, 1992:74)

Chapter 6

Conclusion

‘See *Too Much*’

The dialectical approach is usually perceived as trying to locate the phenomenon-to-be-analysed in the totality to which it belongs, to bring to light the wealth of its links to other things, and thus to break the spell of fetishizing abstraction: from a dialectical perspective, one should see not just the thing in front of oneself, but this thing as it is embedded in all the wealth of its concrete historical context. This, however, is the most dangerous trap to be avoided; for Hegel, the true problem is precisely the opposite one: the fact that, when we observe a thing, we see *too much* in it, we fall under the spell of the wealth of empirical detail which prevents us from clearly perceiving the notional determination which forms the core of the thing. The problem is thus not that of how to grasp the multiplicity of determinations, but rather of how to *abstract* from them, how to constrain our gaze and teach it to grasp only the notional determination. (Žižek, 2008a:x-xi; emphasis in original)

It could be said that this thesis has fallen into the dangerous trap of the dialectic explained by Žižek (2008a). This thesis is structured around a number of interconnected aporia, tensions, problematics and predicaments. This thesis has endeavoured ‘...to break the spell of fetishizing abstraction...’ (Žižek, 2008a:x) in relation to issues such as positionality, the speech act, author function,

representation, interstices, interdependency and borders by illuminating the links between these issues not only with each other, but, also, within the constitutive contexts that they inhabit. I have grasped at the ‘multiplicity of determinations’ (Žižek, 2008a:xi) to show the instability of determinations in order to contest any idea of ‘an established’ and to assert the undecidability of phenomena.

Furthermore, this thesis concerns, and uses, the methodological conceptual framework of Black feminist theory - a theory produced out of the dialectic of the suppression it seeks to resist. The suppression of Black women and their work is constituted of multiple and intersecting determinations reflected in, and resisted by, an immense range, breadth and depth of Black feminist scholarship.

This thesis has wanted to ‘see *too much*’ (Žižek, 2008a:xi; emphasis in original). What we see and do not see is highly political because ‘...an optics is a politics of positioning. Instruments of vision mediate standpoints...’ (Haraway, 1988:288). I have wanted to see Black feminist standpoints that have been mediated out of the picture into the shadows and, then, judged accordingly. This is demonstrated in Christian’s critique of the 1987 special issue of *Cultural Critique* entitled, ‘Minority Discourse,’ where even within a special issue foregrounding minoritised standpoints, the language used served to mediate these standpoints into the shadows. Christian explains that:

...the terms “minority” and “discourse” are located firmly in a Western dualistic or “binary” frame which sees the rest of the world as minor, and tries to convince the rest of the world that it is major, usually through force and then through language, even as it claims many of the ideas that we, its

“historical” other, have known and spoken about for so long. (Christian, 1987:14)

In addition, I have wanted to see how the production of ‘The Occult of True Black Womanhood’ (duCille, 1994) functions not to honour, but to demean, Black feminist studies by:

...treating it not like a discipline with a history and a body of rigorous scholarship and distinguished scholars underpinning it, but like an anybody-can-play pick-up game performed on a wide-open, untrammelled field. (duCille, 1994:243)

I have emphasised the importance of context and welcomed the ‘wealth of empirical detail’ (Žižek, 2008a:xi) as an act of theoretical and narrative resistance (Beard, 2009) to confront the problem of the totalizing, ‘always already’ decided constructions of Black women and their lives.

Indeed, this thesis is testimony to the ‘multiplicity of determinations’ about Black women that are deliberately absent and disavowed, and as such, the ‘multiplicity of determinations’ are much more than merely missing out a research variable. The variables are highly political. The ‘multiplicity of determinations’ that position the scholarship of Lorde, and Black feminist scholarship in general, are highly political. It is apparent that even though ‘[v]ariety, multiplicity, eroticism are difficult to control’ (Christian, 1987:19), this has not stopped those in domination from trying. Re-reading Lorde through a re-reading of contemporary and historical Black feminist writings and speeches from across the world has expanded and provided an important contribution to the understanding of the activism of Black feminist theory. This has been demonstrated through

application of Black feminist theory, and Lorde in particular, to contemporary issues of Black feminist practice. The importance of this application is underscored by Christian, who says:

I, for one, am tired of being asked to produce a black feminist literary theory as if I were a mechanical man. For I believe such theory is prescriptive - it ought to have some relationship to practice. (Christian, 1987:13)

Resisting Attacks on Theory

In the current climate of negativity towards the value of theory, insistence on the positive value of theory is imperative. This thesis is a contribution to that insistence, and that insistence is politically charged because '[t]here can, of course, be no apolitical scholarship' (Mohanty, 1984:19). I find Bion's psychoanalytic idea of 'attacks on linking' (Bion, 1959) particularly relevant to understanding the process of attacks on theory.

Eaton (2005) provides a detailed application of Bion's 'attacks on linking' to the notion of learning, and cites Bion's experiences of World War I as a critical context for the development of his ideas. Eaton comments that Bion:

...realized that groups can become anti-learning assemblages and that failing to learn (indeed failing to think) can be a matter of life and death. (Eaton, 2005:356)

Keeping a grip of the capacity to think theoretically is ‘a matter of life and death,’ and certainly, a matter of the life and death of the activism of Black feminist theory. Here, I am reminded of Christian’s words:

But what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life.
And I mean that literally...a way of knowing that I am not hallucinating...
(Christian, 1987:21)

Bion (1959) proposed that ‘attacks on linking’ between an idea (including the existence and structure of an idea), the understanding of an idea and the habitation of an idea within mental functioning are mounted by the psychotic parts of the personality, and can be found in borderline patients.

Although Bion’s (1959) psychoanalytic conceptual framework was developed in the context of working with borderline patients, and despite the problems of translating the clinical setting of psychoanalysis to the social setting (Parker, 2010), I think there is resonance with historical, liberal and current neoliberal attitudes and practices towards theory in general, and Black feminist theory in particular.

‘Attacks on linking’ has a number of relevant effects, namely: the attempted obliteration of mental functioning between, and within, the patient and analyst; the attempted destruction of the capacity to learn from experience; and a ‘nameless dread’ (Bion, 1959, 1962, 1967) produced from a lack of containment of unbearable (beta elements) thoughts, feelings and imaginings that have been evacuated on account of the distress they cause. Eaton comments that:

This word-*evacuated*-speaks to force and intensity. What is the fate of evacuated distress? Put more simply, what is the fate of the infant's cry of pain? In order for distress to be transformed, Bion suggests that it must find a home in the mind of another. Ideally a mind can be found to register the infant's pain. Still more important, that mind should belong to an individual more emotionally mature-someone with more experience of tolerating distress than the infant. If this is so, then pain can be more than registered, it can be recognized, reflected upon, and replied to creatively and compassionately. Bion asks the question: What does this other mind do for the infant in distress? Something helps the experience of raw emotional distress become an opportunity to evolve in the direction of discovering meaning. Bion says this something that helps is called "alpha function." The discovery of meaning depends upon the mother's ability to use her mind, including her attention, intuition, and emotional experience (all factors in her alpha function) to contain her infant's distress (the beta elements) and to transform that distress imaginatively. (Eaton, 2005:358; emphasis and parentheses in original)

The raw emotional distress of being in a racist, homophobic society needs the rigour of theoretical containment in terms of recognition and processing of the distress. The cry of pain as a result of oppression needs to find meaning. The attack on theory functions to undermine the activism of all theory as a vehicle for resistance to oppression. In terms of Black feminist theory, it is an attack on the '...connection between experience and consciousness that shapes the everyday lives...' (Hill Collins, 2000:24) of Black women and their work.

It could be argued that just as Bion was interested from a psychoanalytic perspective in the condition and presentation of the borderline, this thesis shares this interest from a Black feminist perspective. The aporia of borders as a site of productive thinking is reiterated throughout this thesis both in terms of borders as a tool of regulation, and borders as an indeterminate space of subversive potential. This thesis set out to transgress temporal, spatial and disciplinary borders, and in the spirit of this intervention, I want to offer a re-reading of Anzaldúa's (2007) 'La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness' through aspects of Bion's (1959) theoretical lens of 'Attacks on Linking.'

My purpose is to offer a particular application of Bion (1959) in order to insist on resistance to attacks on theory, and I believe that Anzaldúa (2007) offers such as resistance. Anzaldúa states that '[t]he *mestiza's* dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness' (2007:101; italics in original), and she explains that:

In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. *La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations... (Anzaldúa, 2007:101; italics in original)

Although it could be argued that there are some similarities between Bion's and Anzaldúa's invocations of the borderline/la mestiza as overwhelmed

by the flooding of ‘undesirable ideas,’ including the notion that the ‘...work takes place underground - subconsciously’ (Anzaldúa, 2007:101), a key difference in their formulations, as Anzaldúa describes, is that the ‘...struggle of the *mestiza* is above all a feminist one’ (Anzaldúa, 2007:106). Although, here, Bion and Anzaldúa are concerned with the survival of mental functioning, Anzaldúa frames her political treatise in terms of unequal power relations in the context of a racist, homophobic patriarchy. In relation to surviving theory, I understand something of Bhabha’s statement that:

Survival, in that sense, is the precariousness of living on the borderline and has been one of my ways of close reading and writing. (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000c:373)

‘Attacks on linking’ theory to activism stand in direct opposition to both the dialogical and dialectical foundations of Black feminist theory. I would argue that following comment by Hill Collins applies to all Black feminist theory:

This dialectic of oppression and activism, the tension between the suppression of African-American women’s ideas and our intellectual activism in the face of that suppression, constitutes the politics of U.S. Black feminist thought. (Hill Collins, 2000:3)

Attacks on the activism of Black feminist theory are no coincidence or accident because: ‘One key reason that standpoints of oppressed groups are suppressed is that self-defined standpoints can stimulate resistance’ (Hill Collins, 2000:29).

Remaining steadfast in the insistence of the legitimacy and relevance of Black feminist theory is vital for social justice because:

As long as Black women's subordination within intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality and nation persists, Black feminism as an activist response to that oppression will remain needed. (Hill Collins, 2000:22)

This thesis contends that the activism of Lorde's theory in particular, and the activism of Black feminist theory in general, provide emotional, intellectual and spiritual containment for evacuated distress so that '...pain can be more than registered, it can be recognized, reflected upon, and replied to creatively and compassionately' (Eaton, 2005:357). 'Re-Reading Audre Lorde: Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory' is a conduit to '...transform that distress imaginatively' (Eaton, 2005:358).

Constrain Our Gaze

I return to Žižek's point quoted earlier in this conclusion:

The problem is thus not that of how to grasp the multiplicity of determinations, but rather of how to *abstract* from them, how to constrain our gaze and teach it to grasp only the notional determination. (Žižek, 2008a:xi; emphasis in original)

Here in the conclusion, I want to attempt an abstraction in an effort to 'constrain our gaze' on '....the notional determination which forms the core of the thing' (Žižek, 2008a:xi); the thing being 'Re-Reading Audre Lorde: Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory.'

Before I begin this abstraction, I want to say a number of things:

Firstly, as much as I find the work of Žižek, Derrida and Foucault both affirmative in the task of articulating an emancipatory politics and refreshing in their audacity of imaginings of revolutionary grand theory, I would like them, and other such like theorists, to answer the following questions: why do you not refer to Black feminist theory? Why is the revolutionary, grand theory of Lorde's not in your writings, conference speeches and newspaper commentaries? Perhaps, Žižek's comment that '...today, the false choice between "liberal democracy or Islamo-fascism" is sustained by the occlusion of radical-secular emancipatory politics' (Žižek, 2008b:386) should be applied to the shameful 'occlusion' of Black feminist theory that is tantamount to an attack on linking.

Secondly, I would insist that they examine the principles of Black feminist theory and methodology, including:

- That Black feminist theory is constituted of the dialectic. In other words, Black women have formulated, crafted and communicated their theory out of, and because of, oppression (Hill Collins, 2000);
- That Black feminist theory is constituted of the dialogical. In other words, Black women have formulated, crafted and communicated their theory out of, and because of, active engagement with struggles for social justice (Hill Collins, 2000);
- That Black feminist theory is constituted of the erotic (Lorde, 1978a). In other words, Black feminist theory goes beyond '...the encouraged mediocrity of our society...' (Lorde, 1978a:54). Lorde speaks of the erotic as:

...a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe. (Lorde, 1978a:57)

Thirdly, I would give voice to my own disquiet. If ‘...*the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house*’ (Lorde, 1979b:112; emphasis in original), how do I reconcile using the conceptual frameworks of white men such as Derrida and Foucault to explicate the activism of Lorde’s theory? Johnson comments that:

Jacques Derrida may sometimes see himself as *philosophically* positioned as a woman, but he is not *politically* positioned as a woman. (Johnson, 1989:2; emphasis in original)

Johnson’s statement could be rephrased as the question: ‘Can the “*philosophically* positioned” woman enable a theoretical understanding of the “*politically* positioned” woman?’

This thesis has demonstrated that the work of Derrida can enable us to understand that an aspect of ‘*the master’s tools*’ is the aporetics of positioning. Derrida does not provide an alternative to ‘*the master’s tools*’; rather, his interest lies in how ‘*the master’s house*’ is constructed, including its architecture, foundations and supporting walls. I think the key is in ““working the cracks”...by persistent use of her insider knowledge concerning its pressure points’ (Hill Collins, 2000:282).

Perhaps, the process of forming different tools is in understanding how *'the master's tools'* function. For example, the reason that Trafford Rape Crisis is constituted as a Collective is based as much on our knowledge and experience of hierarchical structures as it is on non-hierarchical structures. In other words, our imperfect efforts to create alternatives to *'the master's tools'* are born out of knowledge of the function and results of *'the master's tools.'*

And, yet, my disquiet persists, because the idea of using knowledge about *'the master's tools'* in order not to replicate these and, thereby, attempting the creation of alternative Black feminist inspired tools, has a number of problems.

Firstly, it contains an inherent contradiction, because any contingency based on an understanding of the function of *'the master's tools'* and a rejection of *'the master's tools'* is, in effect, using *'the master's tools'* to *'dismantle the master's house.'*

Secondly, 'The standpoints of the subjugated are not "innocent" positions' (Haraway, 1988:286) and, as such, the idea that alternatives to *'the master's tools'* will naturally emanate from subjugated standpoints is flawed. Butler summarises the essence of my disquiet:

But I am writing here now: is it too late? Can this writing, can any writing, refuse the terms by which it is appropriated even as, to some extent, that very colonizing discourse enables or produces this stumbling block, this resistance? How do I relate the paradoxical situation of this dependency and refusal? (Butler, 1990b:121)

I agree with Hill Collins that:

Within these parameters, knowledge for knowledge's sake is not enough - Black feminist thought must both be tied to Black women's lived experiences and aim to better those experiences in some fashion. When such thought is sufficiently grounded in Black feminist practice, it reflects this dialogical relationship. (Hill Collins, 2000:31)

Thus, placing theoretical frameworks in a dialogue with the lived experience of grassroots Black feminist practice takes the 'activism' of Black feminist theory seriously. The multiple determinations that configure Black feminist scholarship within this thesis have been constrained into the 'notional abstractions' (Žižek, 2008a:xi) of applications to confront violence against women, and the necessity of Black women-only reflective spaces and dedicated services. I hope that something of the essence of the conceptual frameworks used in this thesis can 'aim to better those experiences' (Hill Collins, 2000:31) of oppressed Black women.

However, in order to further demonstrate the potential, relevance and application of re-reading Lorde and Black feminist theory to current issues, I will conclude by pinpointing a number of issues alive in the Black feminist activism that I am presently engaged with. I propose that negotiating '...a channel between the "high theoretical" and the "suspicious of all theories"' (Boyce Davies, 1994:43) can be achieved by exploring the relevance of theoretical frameworks in dialogical relation to the activism of Black feminist theory. Minh-ha summaries the task as:

...a constant questioning of our relationship to knowledge, to way we reserve, transmit or bring it to bear on our daily activities. Our ongoing

critical view of the system is motivated, not be a mere desire to blame, to right the wrongs and to oppose for opposition's sake. Rather, it is motivated by the necessity to keep power and knowledge (ours and theirs) constantly in check for our own survival. (Minh-ha, 2011:125)

However, as a word of qualification, there is a difference between opening up a dialogue to show relevance and application, and the act of proving a concept is correct by testing it against other concepts and practices. However, I find Bhabha's approach very useful:

I set up a continual tension in the application of a concept, its translatability, and demonstrate at the same time its untranslatability. That's not to say its limits. A concept that merely shows its limits, or is pressed to do so, can still develop a sense of its ontological completion or authenticity - au fond, "this is what it really is." (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000c:372)

With this caveat, here are a number of contentions alive in the Black feminist activism that I am presently engaged with that I have in mind:

Problem 1: Paradox at the Heart of Feminism

At what point, and in what ways, for example, does the specificity of a particular social experience become an expression of essentialism? (Brah, 1996:95)

Trafford Rape Crisis has a dedicated Black, Asian and Minority²² Ethnic (BAME) women's helpline service as part of a range of specific services for BAME women. The rationale for having this dedicated BAME service provision is based on recognition that the entrapments used to subjugate Black women - in this case, in the form of sexual violence - are different to the entrapments used to subjugate white women (Lorde, 1980a:118). In other words, it is in recognition of the specific issues that BAME women face and it is in recognition that the differences in the context, construction and constitution of sexual violence against Black and white women are 'differences that matter' (Ahmed, 1998). The BAME helpline service is advertised as a dedicated service for BAME women, so at Trafford Rape Crisis we assume that the woman ringing the BAME helpline will be expecting the call to be answered by a BAME support worker. The dilemma is, for example, if the BAME helpline rings and there is not a BAME woman present to answer the call, should a non-BAME category woman answer the call? Is it better for the survivor of sexual violence, who is seeking support, to communicate and make a connection with another woman regardless of her racial category than not to have the phone answered at all?

Using the theoretical frameworks within this thesis, I am able to reframe the operational issues presented by the BAME helpline in the following questions: what do the categories of Black and white function to do? Are we not in danger of privileging racial category above service provision? Indeed, are we not edging very close to the production of the authentic caller and authentic BAME support worker relation? What are the mechanics used in the invocation of the authentic? Does it matter who is speaking? (Foucault, 1969) Is the BAME helpline an

²² Please see page vii of the Preface in this thesis for an explanation of the tensions in regards to the term 'minority' when applied in this context.

example of the ‘...*strategic* use of positivist essentialism...’ (Spivak, 2006:281; emphasis in original).

What I have come to know is that the problematic of how to balance the things women have in common with the differences between women is the ‘...paradox at the heart of feminism...’ (Spelman, 1988b:3). Lorde elaborates the complexity of this paradox, stating that ‘[s]ometimes exploring our differences feels like marching out to war’ (Lorde, 1983a:165). The battle of developing a Black women’s service within a feminist Collective of Black and white women can, at times, feel overwhelming, and it is hard not to be seduced by the option of separatist solutions. However, Lorde reminds us of the value of the community of collective-working:

As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist (Lorde, 1979b:112)

Problem 2: There Is No Atom

‘there is no atom’ (Derrida, 1995, cited in Royle, 2003:75)

Many of the women who use the Trafford Rape Crisis helpline use terms such as, ‘I have others,’ ‘inners’ and ‘alters’ to refer to the different aspects of their

internal world that speak. On the helpline it is not uncommon for the identity of the caller to shift in the course of a call. The shift could be from an adult woman to a four-year-old child, and is frequently a shift to a different voice, gender, race, language, religion and belief system. The different voices hold alternative perspectives and information about the 'host' that often provides useful context or details about the trauma of the violence experienced; for example, the voices that emerge from the woman in witness protection when the host is too frightened and too broken down to speak.

In the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) this is classified as a 'Dissociative Disorder,' where 'Diagnostic criteria for 300.14 Dissociative Identity Disorder' are outlined as the following:

- A. The presence of two or more distinct identities or personality states (each with its own relatively enduring pattern of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the environment and self).
- B. At least two of these identities or personality states recurrently take control of the person's behavior.
- C. Inability to recall important personal information that is too extensive to be explained by ordinary forgetfulness.
- D. The disturbance is not due to the direct physiological effects of a substance (e.g., blackouts or chaotic behaviour during Alcohol Intoxication) or a general medical condition (e.g., complex partial seizures). **Note:** In children, the symptoms are not attributable to

imaginary playmates or other fantasy play. (American Psychiatric Association, 2000:529; parentheses and emphasis in original)

Trafford Rape Crisis works with women from a feminist model based on the activism of feminist theory. The majority of women choose to use our service because the medical model has failed to understand, and assist with, the trauma of surviving sexual violence.

In our feminist Collective supervision meetings that function to explore the content and issues of the support work that we are engaged in at Trafford Rape Crisis, I have found the theoretical frameworks used within this thesis of immense value. For example, Derrida's proposal that 'there is no atom,' is explained by Royle (2003:26) in the following way: 'Everything is divisible. Unity, coherence, univocality are effects produced out of division and divisibility.' This captures the essence of the multiple voices we encounter within a call on the helpline. Furthermore, the ways in which Black literary and oral narrative traditions of 'double-voiced texts' (Gates, Jr., 1988:xxv), polyvoice and polyrhythms (Boyce Davies, 1994:23) have been taken up by Black feminists provide inspired approaches to conceptualising '...a dialogue with the aspects of "otherness" within the self' (Henderson, 1989:344).

The encounter with multiple voices within a call on the helpline disrupts the stability of the pronoun and, in the work of Trafford Rape Crisis, invokes the implications and tensions that constitute the politics of the pronoun that I pick up in this thesis in relation to Lorde's use of pronouns in the speech act (Austin, 1975; Barthes, 1967, 1971; Benveniste, 1961; Foucault, 1969).

The ramifications of this interruption are demonstrated within analyses of the telephone call exchanges between Derrida and Cixous, which open up, and extend, the ways that the telephone functions as sightless voices of the indeterminate and multiplicitous other(s) (Derrida, 2006; Prenowitz, 2008; Setti, 2012). Reminiscent of these exchanges is a telephone call between Royle and Cixous (2012),²³ during which Cixous speaks about the telephone as an interruption of death and/or absence, an instrument of metaphormosis, and the tricks of time and delay that the answering machine introduces and offers. All of these characteristics and opportunities are present and put to use within the concept and practice of the Trafford Rape Crisis helpline that is founded on the activism of feminist theory.

In addition, the notion of exceeding the bounds of the text (Barthes, 1967, 1971; Foucault, 1969), or, in this context, exceeding the bounds of voice and unity, and the concept of the supplement that ‘...is neither a presence nor an absence’ (Derrida, 1997:314), are further examples of theoretical frameworks within this thesis that I continue to draw on within my work on the helpline.

Moreover, the concept of the impossibility of hospitality, when applied to the situation of different voices inhabiting the caller on the helpline, disrupts notions of fixed positions of host and guest (Derrida, 2000). These are just some examples of theoretical frameworks that provide approaches to open up, rather than close down, the possibilities and productive thinking about the multiple voices that are present within a woman who uses our Rape Crisis helpline.

²³ You can hear the telephone conversation between Royle and Cixous (2012) at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/video/schools/english/HeleneCixousOnTheTelephone.mp3> and a transcript of the call is at <http://gullsofbrighton.wordpress.com/2011/06/09/distance-and-intimacy-cixous-on-the-telephone/#more-110> (Gulls of Brighton, 2011).

The work of Trafford Rape Crisis is about using voice (for example, through the helpline, writing, art, and therapeutic face-to-face and group work), enabling the specificity of women's experiences to be heard, and using this 'transformation of silence' (Lorde, 1977a) to carve out emancipatory feminist intellectual, spiritual and emotional spaces. In many ways, this reflects the journey I am undertaking within the process of this thesis, where the move to coming to voice, being heard, and then, finding ways to make effective political use of voice, is an on-going and non-linear process. Hill Collins expresses something similar in her journey of moving between the 1990 first edition and the 2000 second edition of writing *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*:

I have learned much from revising the first edition of *Black Feminist Thought*. In particular, the subjective experience of writing the first edition in the mid-1980s and revising it now has been markedly different. I can remember how difficult it was for me to write the first edition. Then my concerns centred on coming to voice, especially carving out the intellectual and political space that would enable me to be heard...I am in another place now. I remain less preoccupied with coming to voice because I know how quickly voice can be taken away. My concern now lies in finding effective ways to use the voice that I have claimed while I have it. (Hill Collins, 2000:xii-xiii; italics in original)

Occupying the Space of the Concept

This thesis has a specific focus on the activism of Black feminist theory articulated through a re-reading of Lorde. However, the reach of its applications applies to the activism of all feminist theory. The task of inhabiting theory invokes a core theme of the thesis - namely, the aporetics of positionality. I find Bhabha's metaphorical use of habitation and occupation of theory, formulated in conversation with Seshadri-Crooks, particularly relevant here:

I like to think that the reader can almost be moved into occupying that space of the concept or the language and be placed in media res. I would almost like it to be a theatricalization of theory so that the reader is a part of it and does not understand it sitting in her chair overlooking and judging the concept from a distance. (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000c:372)

...an experience of how, in motion, in transition, in movement, you must continually build a habitation for your ideas, your thoughts, and yourself. (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000c:373)

Undertaking the objectives of the analysis in this thesis has involved 'continually build[ing] a habitation for' and 'occupying that space of the concept.' El Saadawi summarises the difficulty of this occupancy:

I create words but words create me. Words are all I possess, yet I am possessed by them...Writing has been the antithesis of death and yet, paradoxically, the reason why in June 1992 I was put on a death-list. (El Saadawi, 2009:19)

The aporia of to ‘possess’ and to be ‘possessed,’ to ‘create’ and to be created, and to be put on a ‘death-list’ because of the ‘antithesis of death,’ summons the aporia of the impossibility of hospitality.

In this conclusion, I want to pick up the theoretical lens of hospitality explored within the thesis in order to focus the gaze on the political imperative of theory. The issues of who is host and guest, constructing and deconstructing defences in relation to the ‘absolute, unknown, anonymous other’ (Derrida, 2000:25) of concepts, and maintaining a hospitable demeanour towards theory and the process of writing, continue to be a challenge.

The essence of the impossibility of hospitality is located in the dialectic of the position of ‘the sister outsider.’ Lorde’s identification as ‘the sister outsider’ simultaneously encompasses the intimate proximity of ‘sister’ and the potential hostility of an ‘outsider.’ The situation of *hôte* (host) as guest and guest as *hôte* (Derrida, 1999), in terms of being simultaneously inside and outside of re-reading Lorde as host and guest in the activism of Black feminist theory, ‘turns the home inside out’ (Westmoreland, 2008:6). Performing this in the context of neoliberal ‘attacks on linking’ within a racist, homophobic patriarchy amplifies the challenge. The task becomes the impossibility of hospitality of theory within a war zone.

The relevance of Kristeva’s statement that ‘...a person of the twentieth century can exist honestly only as a foreigner...’ (Kristeva, 1977:286) applies to the twenty-first century and beyond. The temporal and spatial indeterminacy of her statement is secured by her observation that ‘[w]riting is impossible without some kind of exile’ (Kristeva, 1977:298). The question of the foreigner becomes

even more complicated when the very theory inhabited teaches that the demarcation between the hostile stranger and the friendly stranger are mutually constitutive. Thus, any notion of a correct (friendly) and incorrect (hostile) reading or application of a concept is an entrapment. In an interview with Seshadri-Crooks, Bhabha explains that:

...theoretical correctness seems subtly to defeat the process of conceptual work, which must entertain the possibility that any particular body of thought, despite its ruling paradigms and metaphors, has no sovereign mastery of control over its enunciation (inscription or interpretation).
(Seshadri-Crooks, 2000c:377; parentheses in original)

The boundary event of this thesis has revealed that:

...the limits of thought or theory are always showing through other borders of historical, conceptual, and ethical possibility. Theoretical thinking teaches us the nontransparency of ideas, the radical indeterminacy of signifying structures - and this must apply to the making and holding of theory itself, which demands a responsibility to the thinking of a problem as always in excess of, or in violation of, the tools for thinking it.
(Seshadri-Crooks, 2000c:377-378)

This thesis has responded to ‘...the radical indeterminacy of signifying structures...’ through finding ‘...the solution as the unavailability of a unified solution...’ (Spivak, 1985a:55). An excellent example of this is found in Derrida’s ‘...turn from “guarding the question” - insisting on the priority of an unanswerable question...’ (Spivak, 1999:425). Thus, rather than guarding the question of how and why ‘Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface’

(Lorde, 1979a:60), the thesis prioritises the ‘...question of *différance*...that which must be differed-deferred...’ (Spivak, 1999:425; italics in original). Within this thesis, the ‘...other borders of historical, conceptual, and ethical possibility’ (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000c:377) are the ‘historical, conceptual, and ethical’ borders of the activism of Black ‘sister outsider’ theory. The excess is in the dialectic of the border as:

...both the beginning and the outer edge...both the inner and the outer of the other. It is thus at once a boundary and a shared space. (Thiongo, 1996:120)

The ‘boundary event’ (Minh-ha, 2011) of the activism of Black ‘sister outsider’ theory encapsulates the essence of the aporia. The event of the erotic, both as the methodology and the subject under analysis within this thesis, ‘...opens up an interstitial space for the negotiation of meaning, value, judgment...’ (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000c:376).

Where Is the Love?

There is nothing sentimental about Jordan’s (1978) question, ‘Where is the love?’ This question structures Jordan’s analysis of a public seminar entitled, ‘Feminism and the Black Woman Writer,’ at the 1978 National Black Writer’s Conference in Howard University. Jordan states:

From phone calls and other kinds of gossip, I knew that the very scheduling of this seminar had managed to divide people into camps prepared for war. Folks were so jumpy, in fact, that when I walked into

the theatre I ran into several Black feminists and then several Black men who, I suppose, just to be safe, had decided not to speak to anyone outside the immediate circle of supportive friends they had brought with them. The session was going to be hot. (Jordan, 1978:82)

It reminds me of the battles that took place behind the scenes of the event that constitutes the title and content of the 'Preface' to this thesis: 'Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory.'

Out of all of the battles, including practicalities such as funding, accommodation, venue, bureaucracy and time, by far the most arduous was that of the battle for the legitimate right to the audacity to insist on the intellectual, emotional and spiritual space of the convention. However, I knew in my gut that:

...in politics, "major repercussions" do not come by themselves: true, one has to lay the groundwork for them by means of patient work, but one should also know to seize the moment when it arrives. (Žižek, 2008b:392)

In terms of tactics for negotiating a channel between a resolute insistence that the convention should and would take place, and succumbing to criticism and doubt, I understand something of Jordan's predicament:

I wanted to see if it was possible to say things that people believe they don't want to hear, without having to kick ass and without looking the fool for holding out your hand. Was there some way to say, to insist on, each, perhaps disagreeable, individual orientation and nonetheless leave the union of Black men and Black women, as a people, intact? I felt there had to be... (Jordan, 1978:83)

In answer to the question of, 'Where is the love?,' it came from colleagues, friends, 'sister outsiders,' but, primarily, it came from contemporary and historical Black feminist texts and speeches providing testimony that the journey of the convention was well-trodden. For example, in her 1974 address at the conference on 'Black Women in America,' Chisholm declared:

And I stand here tonight to tell to you, my sisters, that if you have the courage of your convictions, you must stand up and be counted...Forget traditions! Forget conventionalisms! Forget what the world will say whether you're *in* your place or *out* of your place. [Applause.] Stand up and be counted. Do *your* thing... (Chisholm, 1974:137; emphasis and parentheses in original)

The 'Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory' convention took place with resounding success: 'Nobody stopped talking. The session ended because we ran out of time' (Jordan, 1978:83).

And, of course, the relevance of the question, 'Where is the love?,' is enduring. 'Where is the love?' underlies the day-to-day realities of the activism of Black feminist theory. 'Where is the love?' structures 'the priority of an unanswerable question' (Spivak, 1999:425) faced with a series of infinite referrals and deferrals manifest in: do we stay at home to put our children to bed, to have time with them after they have been in the cruel world, or do we go to the feminist Collective political meeting? Do we stay at home to hold our children, partners, sisters, brothers and neighbours, and contain their anxieties and their need to be held, in every sense of the word, or do we do our shift on the helpline to hold and contain the women who have been raped, battered and tortured? Do we give our

Black sister a lift home or do we let her take two buses across Greater Manchester in the dark and cold on her own because we are too exhausted, because we have a deadline and/or because we need to get home? After all, it is 11pm and we left the house at 7am in the morning, leaving our children at breakfast club. ‘Where is the love?’

I conclude with words from Jordan that constitute the work of this thesis and the work to be done:

As a Black woman/feminist, I must look about me, with trembling, and with shocked anger, at the endless waste, the endless suffocation of my sisters: the bitter sufferings of hundreds of thousands of women who are the sole parents, the mothers of hundreds of thousands of children, the desolation and the futility of women trapped by demeaning, lowest-paying occupations, the unemployed, the bullied, the beaten, the battered, the ridiculed, the slandered, the trivialized, the raped, and the sterilized, the lost millions and multimillions of beautiful, creative, and momentous lives turned to ashes on the pyre of gender identity. I must look about me and, as a Black feminist, I must ask myself: *Where is the love?* How is my own lifework serving to end these tyrannies, these corrosions of sacred possibility? (Jordan, 1978:85-86; emphasis in original)

Appendix

Routledge 'Concepts for Critical Psychology' Series

Monograph Proposal (Submission: May, 2013)

'Why Critical Psychologists Must Read Audre Lorde: Race, Gender and Social Change'

Synopsis:

This book responds to the invitation to re-think disciplinary boundaries by orientating critical psychology to Black feminist theory and, in particular, to ask critical psychologists to consider the work of Audre Lorde. This book takes what may, at first, seem like an unusual and surprising step across the disciplinary boundary of psychology to Lorde's political essays, speeches, poetry and autobiographical works. Yet, as this book demonstrates, Lorde's work is concerned with issues that are central to psychology; issues such as identity, alienation, trauma, loss, the relationship between the internal and external world, and the position and constitution of the individual within relationships, the family, community and society. Furthermore, Lorde tackles issues that are central to critical psychology, such as individualism, essentialism and normalisation. Lorde questions ideological representations of the individual as separated from social relationships. For example, she exposes the ways in which '...racist social structures create racist psychic structures...' (Oliver, 2001:34).

It is of no coincidence that the discipline of psychology and the productions of psychology (individualism, essentialism and normalisation) exist because of, are constituted by, and are contingent upon, boundaries. Boundaries are problematic – boundaries produce problems and boundaries maintain problems (Thiongo, 1996:120). Lorde cautions that '*...the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*' (Lorde, 1979b:112; emphasis in original), so

she is very cautious of using boundaries to dismantle boundaries. In her explorations of race, gender and social change, Lorde details the daily reality of fragmentation due to multiple and intersecting ideological, political, emotional, disciplinary, geographical and demographical boundaries. Lorde identifies the ways in which these fragmented pieces of identity and experience are represented in a hierarchy, where hierarchies breed hierarchies or fragmentation further fragments (Lorde, 1983b). This process is replicated in the structure, function and outcomes of ‘psychologisation.’

This particular book rejects the idea of crossing disciplinary boundaries and cautious that the very idea of crossing disciplinary boundaries is to accept, and thereby, legitimate, the existence of boundaries at all. Lorde argues that the task is to expose how boundaries function to instigate, maintain and perpetuate separations of people, thinking and experience that produce the madness and misery which create the need for psychology. Thus, rather than presenting cutting edge critiques from outside psychology which work to preserve the idea of an ‘inside and outside’ of psychology, this book uses Lorde to deconstruct such borders.

Using Lorde as a lens of critical analysis on psychology functions on several levels: firstly, it brings unexpected conceptual and methodological resources to bear on the contemporary crisis in psychology; secondly, it addresses debates at the heart of thinking about the political agenda of psychology. Thirdly, the method and practice of bringing Lorde’s work to the table of critical psychology forces us to ask why some theoretical lenses are more expected or unexpected than others.

This book offers Black feminist perspectives, language and paradigms for conceptualizing core issues of psychology. Lorde provides a theoretical lens to scrutinize the silences in psychology in order to show not only how silence functions to produce psychological maladies, but, also, to show how psychology is constituted of, and contingent upon, multiple and intersecting silences (Lorde, 1977a).

A good example of how Lorde’s work can be applied to psychology would be to put the notion of ‘normalisation’ under the microscope of her thinking

outlined in her autobiographical work entitled *The Cancer Journals* (Lorde, 1980b). Here, Lorde deconstructs the concept, ideology and function of using forms of prosthesis to make an amputation invisible and unrecognisable. It is possible to take her explorations of mastectomy, malignancy, the carcinogenic, amputation and the socially sanctioned prosthesis as metaphors to think about the ways in which psychology functions. The Black feminist discourse, analysis and lived experience of Lorde expose psychology as an artificial prosthesis to create, maintain and legitimize the already imposed, artificial prosthesis of normality (Lorde, 1980b:9-10). Throughout her work Lorde is concerned with the invention and cover up of socially constructed malignancies and versions of cosmetic normalisations which are a mimicry of a mimicry (Bhabha, 1994).

Table of contents:

Chapter 1: Introduction: Race, Gender and Social Change

Chapter 2: Methodology

Chapter 3: The Problem of Borderlines

Chapter 4: The Constitutive Outside

Chapter 5: Social Structures Create Psychic Structures

Chapter 6: Silence

Chapter 7: Mimicry

Chapter 8: Intertextuality: Case Notes and the (Auto)Biographical

Chapter 9: Critical Psychology Founded on Black Feminism without Borders

Chapter Outlines:

Chapter 1: Introduction: Race, Gender and Social Change

This chapter provides a context for Lorde's work within Black feminist theory, outlining how her thinking resonates with contemporary ideas and debates. The relevance of this context, the relevance of Black feminist theory and the relevance of Lorde's work to psychology will be mapped out, building a robust argument for why critical psychologists must read Audre Lorde. Core to this argument will be the case for how Lorde offers a radical alternative framework to think about the political role that psychology plays. Race, gender and social change form the nucleus of this book. Race and gender are issues which illustrate how ideology and surveillance within the 'psy-complex' (Hook et al., 2004; Parker, 2005; Parker and Revelli, 2008; Rose, 1998) function to create and maintain categories and criteria of 'the normal,' 'the healthy' and 'the well-adjusted' individual/community. However, race and gender form the nucleus of this book for another reason; that is, as Black feminist theory teaches, dismantling the conceptual apparatus that constructs race and gender offers lessons for the dismantling of the conceptual apparatus that constructs 'psychologisation.' Furthermore, Black feminist theory on race and gender offers models for social change.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter provides a critical analysis of the conceptual tools used in psychology. Traditional qualitative and quantitative tools, methods and measures such as predictability, standardisation, sample sizes, objectivity and repeatability are products of, and maintain, particular ideological apparatus. This chapter argues that to prioritise questions of what the tool or method can do, and how they function, is to miss out a vital priority question; that is, to ask: what constitutes the ideological material that the tools and methodology are cut from? Here is where psychology could learn much from Black feminist theory. Black feminist theory has critically scrutinised the methodology used to explain, measure, diagnose and cure Black women, and in doing so, offers detailed rigorous critiques, models of

dismantling components of these phenomena and alternative approaches. The chapter draws on Lorde to develop a mechanics of methodological theory. For example, Lorde identifies and demonstrates how the subject under analysis and the tools for analysis share a structure and mode of operation that intersect, and are contingent upon each other.

Chapter 3: The Problem of Borderlines

This chapter picks up learning from the previous chapter and illustrates the need for methodological tools to be less sloppy. The clever bit about borderlines is that they create the illusion of a method to transform the sloppy and chaotic into ‘the neat,’ ‘the organised’ and ‘the compartmentalised,’ whilst actually contributing to, and sustaining the root cause of, the problem. The dialectic is that borderlines are used to contain the very problems they produce and the psychiatric diagnostic category of the borderline is a classic example of this. Positions on the borderline shape the subject and objects of psychology.

The chapter uses binaries such as inside/outside, recognition/misrecognition, absence/presence, inclusion/exclusion and normal/abnormal that are usually ‘taken for granted’ (Burr, 1995) to illustrate the ways in which categorisation, segregation and splitting function to maintain the madness and misery they purport to cure. Psychology could learn from more sophisticated models offered by Black feminist scholars such as Lorde. Black feminist models utilise the space in-between constructed binaries. Lorde offers an analysis of how and why fragmentation produces psychological distress and limitations that stifle creative potential. Lorde offers models that illustrate that the sum of the parts is greater than that of Western models of splitting up and dealing with parts separated out. Lorde works with the mutually constitutive relationship between intersecting parts rather than models of addition and subtraction (Crenshaw, 1989).

Chapter 4: The Constitutive Outside

This chapter explains how the discipline of psychology is constituted by what it excludes. Psychology is characterised and identified by demarcating that which belongs to it and that which does not belong to it. People become clients of psychologists because of what and where they belong, and do not belong. This process produces discourses of essentialism and authenticity, where categories of people represent, embody and perform the ‘constitutive outside’ (Hall, 1996:17). The concept of ‘difference’ is fundamental to the logic and legitimization of the ‘constitutive outside.’ It is a logic which functions to mask the anxiety, ambivalence and displacement that the concept of ‘difference’ produces. Here is where Black feminist theory in general, and Lorde’s work in particular, have much to offer in terms of deconstructing the processes and outcomes of the ‘constitutive outside.’ Furthermore, Lorde’s work on race, gender, class, sexuality and social change outlines forms of resistance and alternative models of thinking and acting that psychology ignores at its own peril.

Chapter 5: Social Structures Create Psychic Structures

This chapter uses the work of Lorde as a theoretical lens to focus on the relationship between social and psychic structures, using the examples of race and gender as mechanisms of oppression. Although progressive psychological approaches, such as psycho-social models, acknowledge the importance of context, this chapter uncovers the intersecting social and psychic manoeuvres in the process of subject formation. The chapter draws on the rich, sophisticated and often ignored work of Black feminist theory on the psychological impact of racism and sexism. The chapter uses Lorde to orientate psychology to key seminal works on ‘epidermalization’ (Fanon, 2008:4), the ‘psychic life of power’ (Butler, 1997c) and ‘interpellation’ (Althusser, 1971).

Chapter 6: Silence

This chapter uses the work of Lorde to go beyond an understanding of silence as being that which is unspoken. The chapter investigates how silence operates in the role of the 'psy-complex' and the growth of 'psychologisation' in contemporary society. Instead of a paternalistic promotion of the service-user's voice as a measure of inclusivity and customer satisfaction, this chapter promotes a critical measure and analysis of the 'speech act' (Austin, 1975; Barthes, 1967, 1971; Benveniste, 1961; Foucault, 1969) and speaking position of psychology. The chapter uses Black feminist theory to explore Spivak's (1988) question: 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' The principles and implications of this question, when applied to the subject and object of psychology, transgress neat boundaries into very uncomfortable territory. Lorde's (1977a:40) imperative of 'the transformation of silence into language and action' raises questions about the role of silence in the power/knowledge relationship, and the performativity of language (Butler, 1999).

Chapter 7: Mimicry

This chapter argues that psychology, as a discipline and practice, colonizes social and psychic spaces, and relies on, and (re-)produces, mimicry (Bhabha, 1994). Mimicry is a necessary aspect of any take-over, occupation and appropriation, where X takes over Y in order to control, regulate, re-define and re-inscribe power relations. This chapter argues that the colonisation of social and psychic spaces is a key component in the role of the 'psy-complex' and 'psychologisation.' Colonisation produces anxiety and ambivalence and psychology is an anxious coloniser. This chapter draws on the work of Bhabha (1994) to argue that psychology is caught up in an equation of colonisation-anxiety-mimicry, controlled and masked by paranoid boundaries, where the subject and object of psychology are rigorously patrolled. Lorde articulated how colonisation also involves amputation of the diseased and disordered members imported by the coloniser, and the imposition of artificial prosthesis invented to camouflage, render invisible and unrecognisable, the violence performed in these processes. This chapter draws on the work of Lorde, in conjunction with post-colonial Black

feminist scholarship (Khanna, 2003), as a theoretical lens through which to scrutinise how individualism, essentialism and normalisation function as tools of colonisation and mimicry.

Chapter 8: Intertextuality: Case Notes and the (Auto)Biographical

This chapter provides a critical analysis of the production and function of the (auto)biographical text in psychology. Psychology produces and uses a prolific and varied network of (auto)biographical texts/documentation such as patient case notes, narrative therapy, life story books for adopted and looked after children, survivor testimonials and the use of diaries in psychological interventions such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. These texts are produced by, and exist in, a complex intertextual web (Barthes, 1967, 1971; Foucault, 1969). Furthermore, these texts function in psychology to establish authenticity, intention and notions of subjectivity and identity. Here is where, and precisely why, Black feminist scholarship and traditions of writing are a relevant critical alternative. They directly confront and destabilise bounded representations of authenticity, intention and subjectivity. Lorde grounds all of her work in her lived experience. Thus, Lorde's political essays, journals, poetry, letters, biomythography, speeches and interviews fuse the biographical and theoretical. In other words, Lorde dismantles the boundaries that are set up between the personal and the political, and in doing so, she opens up critical alternatives for social change that build on a long and enduring Black feminist literary tradition.

Chapter 9: Critical Psychology Founded on Black Feminism without Borders

This chapter pulls together key concepts, models and ways forward presented in previous chapters to argue why psychology needs Audre Lorde. This chapter offers a robust case for a radical re-positioning of psychology on a Black feminist theoretical foundation. This includes naming the significant elements within this foundation, imagining what psychology could look like laid on a Black feminist foundation and outlining how this could be a basis for radical social change.

Submission Date and Length:

Submission of the manuscript will be by May, 2013. The length of the monograph will be approximately 50,000 words. Each chapter will be approximately 5,500 words.

Market:

This book will be relevant to advanced level undergraduate and postgraduate students, researchers and lecturers in psychology, psychotherapy, social work, sociology, and those whose work brings them into the field of feminist thinking, critical race theory, discourse analysis, literary studies and cultural studies. The book grapples with issues at the heart of key contemporary debates on methodology, identity, difference, race, gender, social change, and the psychological impact of social constructions. The book threads these core themes to construct a powerful argument for re-reading Lorde as an example of the application of Black feminist theory to a range of intersecting issues. Equally, it would be possible to read each chapter as a contained, informative text in its own right. Thus, the book has a flexible, accessible structure, ideal for a text book. The focus on Lorde's work gives the reader a clear pathway into Black feminist thinking and its application to critical psychology. It offers a model of transferring concepts from one genre to another, involving a questioning of all disciplinary boundaries - something that is key to creative critical analysis, which calls for thinking beyond, and outside, boxes.

Competition:

Although there are texts which explore race and psychology (Fanon, 2008; Kovel, 1988; Memmi, 2003), and texts that examine gender and psychology (The Sage Gender and Psychology series published in the 1990s), it is hard to find a text that explores the intersection of race and gender as illustrative of the role of the 'psy-complex' and the growth of 'psychologisation,' offering a model for social change. It is hard to find a text that offers a robust case for a radical re-positioning of psychology on a Black feminist theoretical foundation. It is even harder to find a text that provides a detailed analysis as to why critical psychology

should read Audre Lorde. The proposed book, 'Why Critical Psychologists Must Read Audre Lorde: Race, Gender and Social Change,' develops and pushes forward key debates in critical psychology (Burman, 1998, 2008; Crawford and Unger, 2004; Mama, 1995; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1995).

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Sample of Author's Work:

Hesk, G. and Nayak, S. (2013) 'Communication problems in a couple.' *In* Bettmann, J. E., Jacques, G. and Frost, C. J. (eds.) (2013) *International Social Work Practice: Case Studies from a Global Context*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Kang-Riou, N., Milner, J. and Nayak, S. (eds.) (2012) *Confronting the Human Rights Act 1998: Contemporary Themes and Perspectives*. Abingdon: Routledge.

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