

Feminist theory has the possibility of an auspicious and exciting future, more exciting perhaps than its illustrious past. Its promise—for the promise is a way of propelling the present into the future—is that it may provide new ways of understanding ourselves and our world(s), ways that are more commensurate with and expressive of women's positions and perspectives. While much of feminist thought in the past has been directed to a critique of the patriarchal past and present and while much feminist activism is directed to challenging and overcoming the forces of patriarchal thought and practice, it may be that, in the future, feminist thought could direct itself instead to the creation or invention of positive alternatives, and not just the critique of patriarchy itself. It may be that feminist theory must re-invent itself as a form of invention.

And what it may invent are a new series of questions and new ways of addressing them. Instead of the questions we are already familiar with—who am I, what is my identity, what forms of oppression characterize my position, how might I express who I am?—questions that have assumed feminist thought is directed to questions of identity and subjectivity, we need to invent new questions, questions that address the world as much as they address the subjects in that world, questions that position the subject in a context in which other forces than the human and the patriarchal are addressed. Questions about the real, about materiality and about force may be asked, but their answers do not require us to address identity and its cognates. Feminist theory in the future may come to look not only within, but also primarily outside, beyond the self, beyond even the collective in which the self finds itself represented or repressed, into a world that is larger than subjectivity and makes subjectivity possible. A world that includes the nature as much as culture, and the animal as much as the human. Feminist theory holds the promise of a new kind of knowledge of the real, a new making of the real, new forms of creativity and conceptualization that may make it a positive force in the recognition of all kinds of differences.

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