

## Deconstructing “Difference” and the Difference This Makes to Education

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The tension between sameness and diversity has been an ongoing feature of modern educational theory and practice, especially in the United States. We seem fundamentally torn between, on the one hand, a desire to use education to make people more alike (whether this is in regards to a “melting pot” of citizenship values and beliefs; the essential texts of “cultural literacy”; the factual knowledge and skills that can be measured by standardized tests; or the establishment of uniform national standards across the curriculum) and, on the other hand, a desire to serve the different learning styles and needs, the different cultural orientations, and the different aspirations toward work and living represented by the diverse population of students in public schools.

Yet I think it is fair to say that the dominant discourse of educational policy in this country has emphasized the *common*: from Thomas Jefferson and Horace Mann, to John Dewey and contemporary figures such as E.D. Hirsch, the basic theme of American schooling has been the emphasis on what every educated person should learn, should know, should be able to do. In part this emphasis has sprung from a democratic, egalitarian spirit, a desire to provide all students with the opportunity to participate in society’s civic and employment arenas. In part, also, it has sprung from assumptions about common educational interests and needs that upon closer scrutiny may not serve all groups equitably.

In recent years there has been a powerful reaction against this traditional emphasis. From feminist, multicultural, postcolonial, and postmodern theoretical positions generally, the postulates of a universal human nature, of canonical texts, of generalizable norms, of a common knowledge base, of shared traditions, of a common standard of citizenship, have been challenged, often under the heading of a counteremphasis on “difference.”<sup>1</sup>

What I would like to do here is to sketch the broad outlines of the critique of educational theory and practice posed by difference theory, talk about what seems most beneficial in this critique, and then push some of these issues further, in part by reexamining some of the different things that “difference” means.

The philosophical origins of difference theory derive largely from the work of early structuralist linguists, especially Saussure. The original insight from which a good deal of postmodern or poststructural theory has grown begins with Saussure’s investigation of what it is for anything to be able to signify.<sup>2</sup> To serve as a sign, a marker (whether that is a letter, a symbol, a gesture, etc.) must be distinguishable from other signs within the same sign system. So, to repeat an example I have used elsewhere, the capital letters O and Q are distinguished by a very small mark that makes them recognizably different (to us); but a mark of identical shape and size added, say, as a flourish at the end of a signature would not signify, might not even

be noticed. Or the difference that *we* recognize between the letters O and Q might not be seen as significant by someone raised with a different alphabet. A system of signs is a system of differences, but these differences may be, in themselves, largely arbitrary. Those differences that *make* a difference, that signify, are defined only in terms of that larger system of relations. But then one might ask, Where does this system of significant differences come from, whose system are we talking about, and what effects does it have? Letters in the alphabet are one thing, but skin color, or styles of dress, or the ethnic identification of last names, or the identifying categories of special education students, are signs also, parts of systems of signification that say that *these* differences make a difference in certain contexts.

Difference theory, broadly speaking, unmask the “naturalness” of these categories and the effects that they have upon us. By questioning the presumption of sameness, it challenges the pretense that certain significations don’t make a difference, when in fact they do. It asks why certain differences are emphasized, to the neglect of others. It is thus a way of making the previously invisible, visible. Most of all, it highlights the relativity of the meaning of these differences, to one system of signs rather than another. When these systems of signs partly define, and are defined by, particular groups who hold dominance over others, why should their interpretations of which differences make a difference, and what those differences mean, hold sway? A challenge to those presumptions is a way of highlighting the privilege inherent in establishing one system of signification over another, and the advantages of power that may result.

From the standpoint of difference theory, the presumption of sameness or normalcy often just means an expectation of conformity with a particular dominant set of standards. This presumption is shared by a range of otherwise quite different views, running from the conservative to the more progressive. For conservatives, “we are all the same” translates into “You are like (or should be like) us.” The more liberal, pluralistic position of tolerance for diversity often just means a disposition to ignore or neglect differences that in fact *do* matter, under the guise of pretending or wishing that they did not. Even the apparently more inclusive claim to “celebrate diversity” often just means the exoticization of difference, of the Other, as something quaint, charming, or curious in a strange, fascinating way — but still viewed and evaluated from a dominant point of view. All of these positions, say difference theorists, share the potential for harm when differences are defined, and their significance established, from within the perspective of a given system of signs, without due regard to the (perhaps) very different meaning of those differences from within the perspective of those being talked about. And when these systems of signification are wrapped up with a high-stakes endeavor such as education, the choice presented to those who are different is to (1) abandon or suppress those differences for the sake of conformity and “fitting in,” succeeding on someone else’s terms, or (2) accept the characterization of one’s own differences from the dominant perspective, becoming alienated from one’s self, or (3) reject the standards and norms others have set, and so lose out on the opportunity education represents — and then often being blamed for it in the bargain.<sup>3</sup>

Now, as I will argue later, this critique should not lead to the conclusion that any attempt whatsoever to establish common educational goals or content is inherently biased or oppressive. But difference theory has served an important service by alerting us to the many unofficial assumptions that we make about sameness in schools; about the subtle forms of difference that are often misread or mistreated when interpreted solely through dominant norms (eye contact, discomfort with aggressive argumentation or questioning, nonstandard forms of grammar, and so forth); and about the real harm done when differences that make an important difference to others are ignored, misunderstood, or trivialized by the schools in which they find themselves.

What difference theory has done, in short, is to shift the burden of proof onto the presumption of sameness.<sup>4</sup> Why do our conceptions of community, democracy, or education so often reflect a presumed commonality among citizens? It is both theoretically more valid, and also pragmatically less likely to do certain kinds of harm, to presume difference, and to carry the caution that one's own perspectives on difference, and on which differences matter, and on what those differences mean, will frequently be inadequate to capture the range of differences that signify for others. This cautiousness, this suspicion of sameness, is a valuable corrective even when one *is* trying to formulate common goals in education, for then one is more likely to consider the different meaning, relevance, and appeal those goals might have for others not like oneself, and to recognize that different individuals or groups may pursue broadly common goals, but in substantially different ways.

Difference theory has had other beneficial influences as well. It has made us question what we count as a significant difference in certain situations. It has made us more aware of significant differences that may have been hidden or unspoken. It has made us reflect on the larger structures of signification that tell us that *this* difference matters, and *that* one does not. It has made us question where such structures of signification come from, and how they gain their force over us. It has made us realize how seemingly small or trivial differences may be related to much larger and more significant differences, so that neglecting the apparently trivial, we end up neglecting the large and significant as well. Finally, difference theory has made us realize that these differences are relative to particular structures of signification, that they are made, or constructed, not inherent; and hence that they could be constructed differently.

One way to put this point is that identity is to a large extent a matter of identification, not of the givenness of certain characteristics; what a difference means, and in fact whether it means anything, is not a steady-state condition.<sup>5</sup> Even when society places a particular interpretation on the significance of certain marks of difference, there is usually still latitude in reacting to or resisting what that means for others. Another way to put this point is that even the language of "sameness" and "difference," which I am using here, seems to imply a purely *descriptive* relation to certain features. Perhaps a better terminology would be a more Arendtian one of *commonality* and *plurality* — the politically constituted formation of groups based on likeness or difference.<sup>6</sup> This latter formulation would make more clear both the

shifting character of such affiliations as well as the social and political consequences of discourses about sameness and difference (though I believe my discussion here leads to the same conclusion).

I should also mention in passing that another element in contemporary difference theory is the “discovery” of those who occupy contradictory positions relative to different systems of signification, or who purposely play with or invert conventional signs to contradictory effect: these people who are “on the borders” are variously discussed as hybrids, as *mestiza*, as monsters — in the original sense of that term — as Creoles, and so on. Their identity and practice can promote an ongoing questioning of the reification that particular systems of difference fall into, and an exploration of new meanings that those differences might have. One obvious instance today is the transgression of certain traditional sex roles and identities — hardly a new phenomenon, but one that is now being discussed more and more openly.

As noted, the emphasis of difference over sameness has a certain political agenda as well. Like all critical theories, difference theory carries a commitment to social change. The emphasis on difference is meant as a counter-corrective, a centrifugal pulling against a centripetal force, insisting upon the legitimacy of deviation from certain dominant norms. Difference theory can promote an agenda of solidarity and self-respect within diverse groups, freed to define the meaning and significance of their own identities. At a more subtle level, difference theory can establish the basis of a coalition forged between otherwise disparate groups, joined in this respect at least: that they share a concern with legitimating difference itself. Furthermore, difference theory often espouses what might be called a kind of “strategic relativism,” of denying the generalizability of dominant norms and values, not by arguing against them, but by claiming exception to their scope of applicability on the grounds of “difference.” In my view, this strategy often lapses over into an unnecessary rejection of *any* generalizable norms or values at all; this sort of relativism fails the moment that such groups demand the respect and recognition of others — for, given only relativistic grounds, on what basis can they do so? Finally, difference theory seeks to promote the conditions of communication *within* categories of difference by identifying grounds of mutual interest and understanding, though sometimes at the expense of discouraging (or seeming to reject out of hand) the value or possibility of communication *across* categories of difference, especially when these categories overlap with positions of unequal relative power.<sup>7</sup>

These political interventions can have progressive effects under particular circumstances, but can also have potentially counterproductive and divisive effects. A wholesale emphasis on difference, though understandable from a corrective standpoint, is just as constraining and distorting as the presumption of sameness. That is, difference as a category can itself, ironically, become reified and static. There are tensions and contradictions buried deep within certain accounts of difference. What I would like to do next is to explore how there are actually different kinds of difference and how difference actually implies sameness (as well as vice

versa). The simple opposing of difference to sameness does not lead to a deep enough understanding of why difference is important, especially for educational concerns.

I am going to explain briefly what I think are five different kinds of difference. There may be others, and there may be cases that overlap these categories. I do not mean anything final or conclusive about these distinctions. But I think that they can be helpful in sparking us to see that when people assert "difference," they are not always talking about the same sort of thing — and, as we will see, when we analyze difference in this way we always see, hiding within it, assertions of similarity as well.

Let's call the first kind of difference *variety*. This means different kinds within a particular category; say, different kinds of fruit, or different kinds of language. It will be clear to you, I am sure, that one can only talk about kinds within a category when the category is known. We have to have some sense of what a "fruit" is, or a "language" is, before we can identify types within it. Moreover, and more subtly, to talk about kinds within a category is also to say that the category *matters*. Sometimes there is a struggle over how a category should be defined, but this is a way of emphasizing its significance as well. In the contemporary context, for example, we might talk about different national identities, and what they mean; we might even want to debate the importance of "nation" as a category in the balkanized world today. My point here is that assertions of difference in terms of a category assume that we share at least some minimal understanding about what the category *is*, and a common sense that it is a significant category.

Let's call the second kind of difference, a difference in *degree*. Here differences are conceived as different points along a continuum of qualities. Different heights would be an obvious example, though the continuum need not be of a numerical standard. Emphasizing differences along such a continuum assumes that people recognize the features that the continuum describes, and have comparable senses, at least, of what some of the demarcations are along it (though, interestingly, challenges to dominant norms may include displacing what are taken to be the "significant" dividing points by emphasizing others, or by emphasizing the continuity of the gradations, and hence the arbitrariness of particular dividing points at all — think about skin color, for example). Finally, challenges to such continua may also take the form of rejecting the scale entirely, as in the scale of "intelligence" as purportedly measured by IQ tests. Often, this sort of critique is also an assertion of difference, an assertion of a different *kind* of intelligence, in which case it is an instance of the variety type of difference, which I discussed first.

Let's call the third kind of difference *variation*. This means a different combination of and emphasis upon certain elements. What I am thinking of here is something like musical variations; different interpretations and juxtapositions of notes which partly retain the character of an original pattern (such as variations *on* a certain theme or melody), but add something new and unexpected to it. What is kept common here are the elements, or at least the basic elements — otherwise the variation would not be recognizable as such — as well as the common understanding of what the original reference point of the contrast is. In the contemporary context,

one might talk about different body types or different states of ability or disability, taken not as deviations from a “normal” body type, but as legitimate alternative states of corporeal identity. However, though they are not judged against some standard body type, such claims do share an understanding of the same basic components, of body elements, senses, and capabilities, expressed in different ways and in different relations to one another.

Let’s call the fourth kind of difference a *version*. Like a variation, it refers to a familiar standard that is altered through interpretation, but unlike a variation, it leaves the key elements of the standard unchanged, simply giving to them a different sense of meaning and tone. One might think about different versions of a play, which do not change any of the lines, but through shifts in characterization or emphasis, give them a significantly different quality. Recently, at Illinois, I took part in a reading of David Mamet’s play, *Oleanna*, in which a male professor is accused of sexually harassing a female student. There are only two characters, but there were four of us involved in the reading. The director, Kal Alston, cleverly suggested that we reread the same scenes while shifting the actors: a white teacher and black student, a female teacher and male student, a female teacher and female student, and so on. It was striking how different in quality the same words were, depending on who spoke them and to whom they spoke; and it was illuminating about the differences we recognize as significant to see how much of a difference they made to how scenes felt to us as actors and to the audience. In the contemporary context, differences of sexual identity might be viewed, in many circumstances, as this sort of interpretation and reinterpretation — and hence questioning — of certain sexual roles. But the sexual roles to which they refer are commonly familiar.

Finally, let’s call the fifth kind of difference an *analogy*. Sometimes differences are identified as relative, not to common standards, but to comparable, parallel standards (so that A is to B as C is to D). This is a more abstract sense of difference, so it is no surprise that the clearest cases of illustration come from the symbolic order itself; styles of dress, slang vocabulary, bodily ornamentation, and so on. At a much, much more complex level, one might also talk about a diversity of moral distinctions and categories within this same type of difference. A difference by analogy shows that, even when a particular difference in itself is novel, unexpected, or unique, it can be shown to serve comparable, parallel purposes, as do similar markers in other contexts. This analogy gives us a potential basis on which to discuss them and compare them. What is shared in common are not the particular practices, or the system of belief and value that supports them, but a larger frame of reference in which they can be seen as related, parallel, phenomena.

What has this discussion been meant to show? *Not* that differences do not matter, or that apparent differences are not really very different at all, or that underneath our differences we are all basically the same. All of the differences I have been discussing are real differences — or it is better to say *significant* differences. Analyzing them in this way is not meant to dissolve them or minimize them. But it is revealing, I think, to examine how they work, to disclose and question the naturalness of “difference” just as we disclose and question the naturalness of

"sameness." Moreover, the discussion in each case shows, I think clearly shows, that one can only talk about a "difference" against the background of something that is shared in common — that the very assertion of difference says that we agree that something is important and that we share at least some broad understandings of what it is and why it is important.<sup>8</sup> Contexts of radical, *incommensurable* difference are, therefore, relatively rare. Strategic relativism is not a sustainable independent position. And, interestingly, the very discourse of "difference" shows this to be true.

To turn a phrase from Lewis Carroll, no one seriously asks the difference between a raven and a writing desk; they are too totally different to be compared. We emphasize differences within the context of at least implicit understandings of sameness. Saying that something is different from one thing is another way of saying that it is the same as something else. Or to put this differently, a different X is always a different X. (And, by the way, to say that two things are the same is, as long as they are *two* things, to say that they are different as well.) Difference and sameness always occur together; each implies the other. In particular contexts, it may be important to emphasize one over the other, and this is what a good deal of difference theory is about: emphasizing differences where others have assumed sameness.

Where does this leave us? It suggests, first of all, that the advocacy of "difference" has some complex, contradictory elements to it. Where it is used to mean "we are not like you," or "you cannot speak for us," its social and political impact is quite straightforward.<sup>9</sup> But beneath this usage are more complex implications. For me, one of the chief areas of interest are the conditions in which communication and understanding can be possible across differences — and I have always been troubled by the assumption that difference is necessarily radical, incommensurable difference. The assertion of difference has sometimes been a way to foreclose dialogue, or to discount the possibility of its being worth the effort. This is a destructive and counterproductive assumption in many social and political contexts, but especially in educational contexts.

As we view difference in this more constructivist way, we see that difference is *made*, but made in conditions where the raw material conceptually is also the stuff of sameness. And sameness is made, too. Then questions of *how* difference and sameness come to be made, under what conditions or at what point in history, and by whom and with what effects, come naturally to the surface. The five categories of difference discussed here can be read as part of a construction manual, if you will, of how differences get defined and justified as important.

In my view, the key point that emerges from this examination is that *what counts* as an important difference is a fluid notion. Differences should be reified no more than similarities should be. In the recent television documentary, *School Colors*, Latino/a students walk out of high school saying that their identity is not given as much credence by the administration, teachers, or other students as are the predominant white and African-American categories (there is an African-American Studies program in the school but not a Latino/a studies program, for example). Under the banner of *La Raza*, they assert their common identity and interests over and against those of other groups: "we are not like you." Unfortunately, that common banner

becomes problematic when scuffles and arguments break out within the group between Mexican-American students and students from other countries in Latin America, from Puerto Rico, and so on: “*we are not like you.*” Among other things, this should make us wonder about the logic of separatism taken to its logical conclusion.<sup>10</sup> What differences make a difference, and to whom, and compared against what, is a deep puzzle, a conceptual puzzle, one with serious social, political, and educational consequences.

What are some of these educational consequences? A theory of difference, fully developed, might be viewed as a kind of map, or guide, or concordance, or translation, or codebook. It should help us to recognize significant differences where we did not see differences before. It should help us to see them as significant, without seeing them as essential or unchanging. It should help us to see that the way those differences are constructed or interpreted from one standpoint is just that, and that other standpoints are possible and — in many circumstances — at least equally valid. It should help us to see the deeper ways in which difference and similarity imply and inform one another.

We could work this up into an entire educational program, I believe, which I can only sketch briefly here right now. It is not just a matter of what most people understand as “multiculturalism,” of teaching *about* diverse cultures, traditions, or systems of belief. It is not just a matter of supplementing a standard curriculum with representative samplings from other points of view. It is not just a matter of introducing or displaying elements from other cultures, often out of context, for their exotic, colorful flavor — “let’s celebrate *Cinco de Mayo* day!” This sort of diversification of the curriculum may be beneficial, or not, depending on how it is done. But it is really only a step, a means to something deeper and more important educationally. Tolerance of difference, or for that matter a particular celebration of difference, are not the ultimate educational outcomes we should be after; it is the critical re-examination of difference, the questioning of our own systems of difference, and what they mean for ourselves and for other people. At some level, nearly all educational goals could be tied into this basic concern.

As many critics have noted a good deal of current schooling seems to be about either ignoring differences — treating them as if they did not matter — or about actively erasing them. Many families, from a variety of standpoints, feel that the only way to preserve the integrity of their culture and traditions is to pull their children out of public school entirely — if they can afford to do so. Yet that choice, too, has some countereducational consequences, because education should not simply be about transmitting an existing system of belief and value, unchanged, from one generation to the next; there must be some room for questioning, re-interpreting, and modifying that system in light of a broadened understanding of where it fits in the context of a diverse, rapidly changing world.

One of the primary features of this world is the growing awareness of difference itself; we are beginning to appreciate that questions about where those differences come from and how they come to mean what they do to different groups raise fundamental questions in turn about the world, and about why we have come to settle

on one account of it as opposed to another, depending on who we are and where we live. It is to recognize that much about our own systems of difference can be seen, from other points of view, as strange and exotic in the same way that other systems of difference appear to us. This does not necessarily lead to relativism, in my view; but it does lead to appreciating the arbitrariness of at least part of what we take for granted about ourselves and about others, along with the realization that from within another frame of reference those assumptions will appear quite different. "Multiculturalism," in this sense, is as much about a critical reflection on our own culture, our art, our science, our ethics, and so on, as it is about the exploration of others' beliefs.

Therefore, this questioning and re-examination of systems of difference can be seen, at some basic level, as an essential part of education itself. The use of works of literature, the study of history, the intimate and respectful encounter with other traditions and cultures, *on their own terms*, in part to understand how our categories of sameness and difference have come to be, can be seen as an exploration of the assumptions and values through which we constitute our identities and the ways in which these assumptions and values are intimately wrapped up with larger social and institutional patterns. Done carefully, and respectfully, such questioning and re-examination can be the occasion for truly profound insights about ourselves as well as others. But even more than this it can illuminate something crucial about the way in which we *make* our lives, or in which they are made for us, within tacit categories of sameness or difference that could be re-made differently.

By shifting the burden of proof away from the presumption of sameness and toward an awareness of and sensitivity to difference, difference theory has created the possibility for rethinking education in a significantly new way. Yet, as I have tried to suggest here, little is gained if "difference" simply becomes another way of stopping conversation by dividing perspectives from one another, or by arguing the relativity of all beliefs and values. What can be worth talking about, under those conditions? The very purpose of examining the ways in which differences are made, I believe, is that it allows us then to consider *this* process against the background of categories of sameness and difference *alike*, to see these as equally open to reconsideration, and to open a conversation, together, of what they mean, of what we *want* them to mean, as we seek a way to live.<sup>11</sup>

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1. Probably the most often-cited article on this subject in education is Elizabeth Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't this Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy," *Harvard Educational Review* 59, no. 3 (1989): 291-324. See also, for example, Yedullah Kazmi, "On Being Educated in the West: The Disruption in Self as a Narrative and Authenticity and Inauthenticity of Self," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 10 (1990); Yedullah Kazmi, "Thinking Multi-culturalism: Conversation or Genealogy and its Implication for Education," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 20, no. 3 (1994): 65-87; Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman, "Have We Got a Theory for You!" *Women's Studies International Forum* 6, no. 6 (1983); and Iris Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990). Several essays address this topic in Barry Kanpol and Peter McLaren, eds., *Critical Multiculturalism: Uncommon Voices in a Common Struggle* (Westport, CT: Bergin Garvey, 1995) and Christine Sleeter and Peter McLaren, eds., *Multicultural Education, Critical Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995).

2. On Saussure, see Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967) and Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). A fuller account of this subject would need to engage Derrida's discussion of *différance*: see Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1-27; and David Wood and Robert Bernasconi, eds., *Derrida and Différance* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988). My preliminary thoughts on Derrida and *différance* can be found in Nicholas C. Burbules and Suzanne Rice, "Dialogue Across Difference: Continuing the Conversation," *Harvard Educational Review* 61 (1991): 399-400.
3. This line of argument can find support in Jean-François Lyotard's *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).
4. This way of putting it was first suggested to me by Leigh Star, in her essay "Misplaced Concretism and Concrete Situations: Feminism, Method, and Information Technology," presented to the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory, University of Illinois, Fall 1995.
5. This point about identity and identification arose in a conversation with Pradeep Dhillon.
6. The significance of Arendt's categories for this discussion was pointed out to me by Melissa Orlie; see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).
7. This disagreement is the subject of my exchanges with Elizabeth Ellsworth (see above); see also chapter seven of Nicholas C. Burbules, *Dialogue in Teaching: Theory and Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993).
8. I think here of the film *Fires in the Mirror*, by Anna Deavere Smith, in which she portrays eighteen different characters, Black and white, male and female, young and old, Jewish and anti-Semitic, all commenting on the events in the 1991 confrontation between Blacks and Hasidic Jews over a pair of killings in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. One is struck by the diversity of perspectives, of voices, of moral frameworks, as different members of the community struggle to explain the killings, and many of these world views appear to be strictly irreconcilable. On the other hand, they are all portrayed by one person who — to the very extent that these voices can be appreciated by the audience — has managed to understand and represent them all. Thanks to Pradeep Dhillon, Megan Boler, and Wendy Kohli for introducing me to this amazing film.
9. See Lugones and Spelman, "Have We Got a Theory for You," on the issue of who speaks for whom.
10. See Gail Pheterson, "Alliances Between Women: Overcoming Internalized Oppression and Internalized Domination," *Signs* 12, no. 11 (1986): 146-60, for an illustration of the logic of separatism run wild. Thanks to Audrey Thompson for this example.
11. The number of citations in this essay to what other people (in this instance, all women) have suggested or explained to me shows how much my thinking on these issues has been influenced by others. I would not, however, hold them responsible for any particular claims (or errors) I might make here. This manuscript has been responded to by Zelia Gregoriou, Natasha Levinson, Melissa Orlie, and Leigh Star; and it benefited from conversations with colleagues at the University of California at Los Angeles, where it was presented in a much earlier form.